ALASKA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELING:

CURRENT PRACTICES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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A

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Abstract

Professional school counseling has roots as far back as the nineteenth century in the United States. Along the way there have been many changes in title and duties for the school counselor, who by recommendation of the American School Counseling Association as well as the state of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, acts as the professional leading the comprehensive counseling program. Elementary comprehensive counseling programs are designed to be developmental in nature and preventative in practice. Additionally, they are intended to make the counseling program available to all students, not just those who are high achieving or at risk within the school community. However, there is a great deal of variance in how programs operate in Alaska. This research used mail surveys to gather data from potentially all elementary school counselors in the state of Alaska. Data were then considered in regards to the suggested comprehensive counseling program to evaluate and produce informed recommendations. One of the specific challenges that Alaskan elementary school counselors face is that of larger than recommended student-to-counselor ratios. Additionally, many counselors are operating in more than one school. Counselors working in the field suggest that curriculum is a much needed resource as well as recommendations that a counseling coordinator be employed to assist in bringing a more uniformed structure to counseling programs in the state of Alaska. School counseling, as well as education in general, has undergone many changes over the last century. Counseling programs in Alaska will need to continue to change and adapt if they are to meet the needs of students and communities.

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Introduction

In this era of accountability, professional school counselors are required to not only describe what they are doing but also demonstrate how it is contributing to student achievement (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). These are difficult requirements for a profession that has historically had a job description which was defined more so by its various responsibilities and driven by stakeholders, such as students, parents, school boards or principals. Many professionals within the school building do not know what exactly a school counselor should be doing, thus accountability is nearly impossible to consistently demonstrate. Chapter One will describe the historical development of the school counseling profession, starting at the first efforts of school counseling, before it was even a profession. Showing how school counseling has been influenced over the years by many socio-political forces to evolve into the profession it is today, both nationally and as it applies specifically to Alaska elementary counseling programs.

Professional organizations, such as the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) have put a great deal of effort into defining and guiding the role of the professional school counselor. ASCA does this through providing a comprehensive counseling program model from which to build programs, form roles and define counselor duties. The main components of the comprehensive counseling program are explored in Chapter Two, as well as other considerations when implementing this type of model, such as strengths and challenges. Additionally, variances in how programs are implemented in elementary counseling programs versus other levels of the educational system are referenced.

The literature supports the implementation of a comprehensive counseling program. This research examined how closely current practices of Alaska elementary school counselors follow the recommended practices put forth by ASCA's national model for comprehensive counseling programs. Due to the specific needs of individual schools or lack of resources within school districts, there are professional elementary school counselors who choose not to implement a comprehensive program even after a detailed job description and subsequent professional identity has been outlined. Other professionals may choose only to partially implement the recommended practices (Larivee, 2002).

The present study began by gathering survey data from Alaska elementary school counselors working in the field. The Counselor Activities Survey, developed by this researcher, through the use of state and national standards as well as the professional literature, was mailed to every elementary school counselor in Alaska. Chapter Three explores the methodology of this survey research. Due to some counselors in Alaska covering kindergarten through the eighth grade, or even kindergarten through the twelfth grade, counselors were asked to answer the survey only for their work with kindergarten through the sixth grade to maintain a clear description of what is meant by elementary school counseling.

Chapter Four characterizes the data into the elements of counseling programs, the components of counseling programs and self reported suggestions from Alaska elementary counselors for how counseling programs could be improved. The fifth and final chapter covers a detailed discussion of the findings and recommendations for ways

that counseling programs in Alaska can strive for success. The findings from this research will help to bring more clarity to the professional school counselor's role within Alaska elementary schools. It will also assist in identifying future training and support directions within this profession in Alaska. This study provides for consideration of how counselors in Alaska are utilizing the recommended practices presented by ASCA. Additionally, the needs of school counselors currently working within Alaska elementary schools will be better identified.

Professional school counselors within Alaska are presented with all the same challenges as other counselors across the nation with the added concerns of many rural and isolated locations. This additional stressor for school professionals has been identified and addressed by the state school board with regards to developing mentoring programs for teachers and principals. Similarly, counseling professionals within elementary schools in Alaska need to be supported at all levels (i.e., national, state, district, school) if they are to achieve effective counseling programs.

Chapter 1

The Development of School Counseling

1.1 Introduction

Professional school counseling has roots as far back as the nineteenth century in the United States, though it was not a profession then. Originally, school counseling consisted of teachers performing extra duties to assist students with career development. Along the way there have been many changes in title and duties for the school counselor, brought about largely because of socio-political changes within the country. These changes have in turn influenced legislation and mandates aimed at student achievement. As well as changes at the national level, school counseling has evolved within the state of Alaska.

Today there are many professionals working together within the elementary school building to promote the success of students. The role and purpose of most of these professionals is clear; what the professional should be responsible for as well as what they should not be responsible for within the school system is known. However, identity and role definition continues to be a gray area for many elementary counseling professionals. When speaking of roles, what is implied is a set of expectations of an individual who is occupying a certain position. Role stress within the counseling profession is a common occurrence which happens when the counselor faces demands that directly conflict with their believed role, when there is no clear role expectation, or when there are too many role demands on that individual. Role stress can lead to the counselor losing effectiveness in their programs (Culbreth et al., 2005).

School counseling programs should be designed from the concept of counselors engaging in a continuous process of assisting students in certain competency areas and planning for the future while at the same time taking their current developmental level into consideration (Herr, 2002). The role that a professional school counselor plays within the school community can either support this process through appropriate interventions and tasks or it can become a more crisis based effort where the counselor performs many non-counseling tasks and responds to the latest crisis (Myrick, 1987). This is where the professional association for school counselors offers assistance. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) provides a structure for defining the roles and responsibilities of school counselors through the comprehensive counseling program model.

1.2 Historical Perspective on Professional School Counseling

School counseling began with high school teachers working part-time doing vocational guidance activities with their students. Over time, guidance counseling became a full-time position in and of itself. However, there are still cases today of teachers acting in the capacity of school counselor for Alaska elementary schools which do not employ a counselor. School counseling programs also began to move slowly from its origins at the high school level down to the elementary level. There were changes in political and social forces within the country which brought with them changes in school counseling programs. Current elementary counseling programs are very different from early efforts at the high school level. There is now a focus within elementary counseling programs on group work, prevention, and early intervention.

Historically, school counseling was focused on vocational guidance (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The first program that could be labeled school guidance was introduced in Detroit by Jesse B. Davis in 1889. Davis was a principal who incorporated a guidance program into each English class within his high school. He encouraged teachers to have students write essays that would assist them in their career development and also with social concerns (Coy, 1999). The value of guiding students in terms of their career or vocation was beginning to be viewed as an important pursuit within the educational system.

In 1908, Frank Parsons emerged as a leader in what would become vocational guidance (O'Brien, 2001). Parsons was employed in a wide range of professions throughout his short lifetime. He is best known in the education field for his position on career guidance. Parsons believed in individualization and equality through career guidance. He felt that education could be an agent for social change and as such all persons, including those from disadvantaged groups, should have access to career guidance whereby the counselor would assist them in making informed vocational decisions. Additionally, it was proposed by Parsons that career guidance was needed for younger students as well; thus the first look at counseling with elementary students (O'Brien).

Building from the earlier ideas of Parsons, E.G. Williamson developed a trait and factor approach to counseling in the 1930s. Williamson felt that this theory could be applicable to more than just vocational guidance, although that has been where this theory has been most applied. Williamson's concept was the first organized guidance and

counseling theory (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). It stressed that the right stimulants during the right time periods could affect change in a student's development. This idea of guiding development reinforced a need for guidance counselors within the school building, especially at the elementary level.

Today, elementary school counselors spend about a third of their time in assisting students through group lessons to acquire the knowledge and skills to promote their academic, career, and personal/social development. Williamson's theory presented an initial look at dramatically changing the role of the guidance counselor. Suddenly, the sole focus of transitioning students out of school developed into supporting them within school as well. However, for the most part, school counselors continued to be teachers who were on special assignment within the school to assist in post-secondary transitioning, and continued to be employed mainly at the high school level (Gysbers, 2001b).

It was not until the middle of the 20th century that school counseling received a professional status (Bauman et al., 2003). At that time, school counselors were operating under the department of Pupil Personnel Services (Coy, 1999), which addressed areas of guidance, social and psychological services, and attendance concerns (Gysbers, 2001a). The three basic models that were in use at this time were the services model, process model, and the duties model. Each of these three models addressed assessments and placement with no stated task of identifying student needs or suggestion for the allocation of school counselors' time. School counseling was more reactive and administrative

which led to counseling being viewed more as an ancillary program within schools (Gysbers, 1990).

1.3 Counselors' Changing Roles

After World War I, the school counselor's role began a significant change due in part to the common use of intelligence tests by the military which then led to the use of testing within the vocational guidance program (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Schools were receiving pressure to identify and support students in the areas of science and math and it was believed that the use of intelligence tests could assist with this goal. There was a fear at that time in the United States that the country's students were not being guided properly into the area of hard sciences, which in turn would make the country fall behind technology wise to the Soviet Union (Lambie & Williamson), and with the use of intelligence tests counselors could properly place students in areas where they would be able to best serve their country. The aim was that school personnel could guide students into math and science careers and thus maintain the United States as a world contender in the area of technology, specifically space technology (Herr, 2002). Since counselors used these test results to assist students with the transition to post-secondary education, the duties of high school guidance counselors did not change, simply the means for which the task was completed.

The counselor's role during this time remained primarily a very directive one. School counselors were expected to gather facts about students and then give guidance or direction. There was not a focus on the relationship with students, which would develop later as a significant part of the counselor's role in the school, due in part to the work of

Carl Rogers and the Humanistic movement within the United States (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). School counselors were expected to help secondary students discover their options after graduation. Much attention was given to preparing college bound students for the transition into post-secondary education (Herr, 2002) and preparing students to enter the workforce (Gysbers, 2001a).This image of school counselors being primarily transition agents is one that many administrators and school counselors continue to have at the high school level, despite all the social and academic changes of this century (Johnson, 2000).

Carl Roger's work during the 1940s influenced a transition for the school counselor's role, which began the shift away from psychometrics, such as intelligence testing, as a focus of school counseling (Gysbers, 2001a). It is believed that Rogers may have had the most significant impact of any theorist on the development of modern counseling approaches (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Rogers stressed the importance of creating a safe environment for the student to realize their potential. He believed that this was best done through the development of a relationship with the student. This approach had an effect of changing the focus of guidance counseling to assisting students in the areas of cognitive, personal, social and moral development through a relationship with the student. That is, the student was to become a team member in their own development, and the guidance counselor was to travel on the path to these developments with the student, but not lead the student in the same directive way as before.

Throughout this development, there were legislative movements that also changed the role of the school counselor. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 (Herr,

2002) and the later amendments to this Act in 1964 charged school counselors with identifying and supporting gifted students (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). It was near this time, in 1959, in which Alaska became a state and shortly thereafter began organizing and addressing counseling within the schools. Just eight years after statehood, Alaska developed a state-level position of School Counseling Coordinator, which unfortunately has not been consistently in place within the state since that time (Buckner & MacKenzie, 1990).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as well as the Vocation Education Act Amendments of 1968, earmarked funds to support guidance and counseling professionals within school systems to develop counseling programs, specifically monies were set aside to support counselors in elementary schools (Bauman et al., 2003). Then the Educational Act for All Handicapped Children of 1975 increased the school counselor's role to include supporting all students to be successful within the school (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Both of these acts, as well as publications by the national Commission of Excellence in Education, which published a report claiming a need for interventions as well as accountability from schools for the success of all students, contributed to the changing roles of school counselors and suddenly made elementary school counseling a more common occurrence (Lambie & Williamson), though still not defining roles with any clarity (Herr, 2002).

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, school counselors nationwide began to become aware of the increasing role confusion and conflict within their profession which gave rise to the comprehensive developmental program (Gysbers, 2001a). Three new models

were introduced at this time for changing school guidance programs by Myrick, Johnson and Johnson, and also Gysbers and Moore, with later revisions by Gysbers and Henderson (Gybers).

In 1971, the United States Office of Education awarded a grant to the University of Missouri-Columbia to assist in developing a guide for implementing career guidance, counseling, and placement programs in schools. The manual was heavily influenced by Gysbers and Henderson's model and was published in 1974 (Gysbers, 1990). The resulting model provided for three basic organizational structures: curriculum-based functions, individual facilitation functions, and on-call functions. This model also provided a suggested time-distribution for school counselors to organize their programs. This was the first time that the allocation of counselors' time had been addressed in school counseling. Additionally, differing time allocations were given for the high school, middle school and elementary levels, recognizing that there are separate need priorities for elementary students (Gysbers).

Over the next several years, the original model put forth by the University of Missouri-Columbia was revised and enhanced. By 1978, the focus of this model had shifted to one of a comprehensive, developmental guidance program. In the revised model there were several new recommendations added to the program. A written definition that outlines the counseling program's mission statement was one of these new recommendations. There was also a recommendation that programs include a written rationale defining the importance of the guidance program as part of a total educational

system and written assumptions that provided the basis for the principles that shape and guide the counseling program.

In this revised Missouri-Columbia model, specific guidance program content and processes were outlined more clearly. The content aspect of the model described the skills students should acquire from participating in the program. These skills were focused on the areas of academic, career and personal/social development. The process aspect outlined what guidance activities the counselor should be doing in the program. These specific guidance activities were grouped into four main components: curriculum-based processes, which changed over time to guidance curriculum; individual-development processes, which came to be called individual planning; on-call responsive services, which developed into simply responsive services; and system support (Gysbers, 1990).

The 1980s saw a change due to an increasing demand for accountability within the school. While the report, *A Nation at Risk*, did not call for this accountability specifically with school counselors, it did focus the nation's attention on declining student performances (Bauman et al., 2003). This report, along with the 2001 No Child Left Behind legislation, ushered in an era of accountability for school counselors. Attention changed from what the school counselors were doing to how students were different as a result of what counselors were doing. The focus was not on the process but on the content and outcomes of programs. School counselors were then coming into a position to be advocates for students and to assist in removing barriers for them (Bauman et al.), putting the counselor at the forefront of accountability for student achievement.

In 1988, during this new era of accountability, a task force in Alaska, in which Norman Gysbers participated, decided to endorse Gybers' comprehensive school guidance model. The *Alaska School Counselor Program Guide* was developed from this model and then adopted and endorsed for all schools within Alaska by the Alaska State School Board in 1989 (Gysbers, 1990). Over the years, there have been slight changes in title with newer versions of this guide. In 2001, The *Comprehensive Counseling Program for Alaska Public Schools: A Guide for Program Development K-12th Grade* was produced as a revision of the 1989 model by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (ADEED). Most recently, the Alaska School Counselor Association produced a guide entitled *Alaska School Counseling Framework,* which ties together the American School Counselor Association's national model with additional considerations unique to Alaska such as rural locations, lack of sunlight, and itinerate counseling (Alaska School Counselor Association, 2007).

The role of school counseling has changed over the years in accordance with social and political changes in the country (Gysbers, 2001a; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Among all the historical changes, school counselors have taken on many additional responsibilities within schools. During the 1990s, the American School Counselor Association began advocating for a change in title to match the change in responsibilities. School counselors were no longer simply aiding students in the transition from school to work. Now counselors were performing many duties including assessment, intervention, collaboration and consultation, as well as guidance. Thus the title of guidance counselors

changed to professional school counselors to more clearly represent the counselor's job duties (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

1.4 Challenges Facing Counselors Today

Increasingly, professional school counselors are beginning to be required to not only show what they are doing but also how it is helping student achievement. Many professionals within the school building do not know what exactly a school counselor should be doing, thus accountability is very difficult to demonstrate. Professional organizations, such as ASCA have put a great deal of effort into defining and guiding the professional school counselor through contributing a counseling model as well as outlining appropriate counseling tasks. Professional school counselors within Alaska face all the same challenges as other counselors across the nation with the added job stress of many rural and isolated locations.

Paisley and McMahon (2001) explored four identified challenges which face counselors in schools today. The most significant, according to this pair, is the challenge of role definition for the school counselor. There continues to be a pull between accountability for academic achievement and a need for mental health services to enhance personal/social areas. In many schools, professional school counselors may well be the only staff on-site within the school building with the training in both mental health issues and education (American School Counselor Association, 2003). Often, counselors within the school system are the only mental health professional that children will have access to (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Johnson (2000) contends that there need not be an either/or approach to this issue, but rather that the mental health needs of students

should be addressed in the context of an overall approach to promoting student success in the areas of personal/social, career and academics.

School counselors must have at least a master's degree and state certification in Alaska (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2006). Considering this level of education and training, it is profitable to both the school and the students to have school counselors fulfill their role within the school community. ASCA has provided a role description which outlines what is believed to be a balanced approach towards addressing student needs through three specific domains: academic, career and personal/social (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). It is suggested in this proposed role definition that counselors be familiar with and implement established interventions aimed at specific student standards to the furthest extent deemed appropriate in their school community.

A second challenge brought forth is that of increasing diversity in the student populations within schools. It is believed that many interventions and models are geared toward white, middle class students and do not meet the needs of other populations. Whiston (2002) argues that many of the theories that guide interventions were developed during the 1950s and 60s and that there is a considerable lack of current theoretical writings for school counseling. Additionally, for many cultural minorities, including Alaska Native youth, there must be a tie in with the values or traditions in the culture if students are expected to be successful learners in the dominant society (Morotti, 2006).

The challenge of diverse student populations is especially relevant for counseling programs within Alaska where there are unique aspects of diversity within schools.

Elementary school counselors in Alaska may have a majority of their community comprised of persons with a White ethnicity but with a small percent of Alaska Native, Black, Asian, Hispanic or Hawaiian ethnicities in the more urban areas such as Anchorage, Juneau or Fairbanks. While counselors in rural locations could have very homogeneous populations comprised of almost exclusively Alaska Native ethnicities with small portions of persons with White ethnic demographics and very little other ethnicities in communities such as Bethel, Dillingham or villages in the Northwest Arctic Borough (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Thus, counselors in Alaska elementary schools are currently working with interventions that as Whiston (2002) stated, may be outdated for the population they serve.

Accountability comes as a third identified challenge for school counselors in Paisley and McMahon's (2001) study. The trend towards accountability forces counselors to conduct program evaluations and demonstrate how the program is benefiting students. This is a challenge especially for counselors who are unaware or uncomfortable with evaluation techniques used in schools. The fourth area of focus that may present as a challenge to school counselors is advancing technology. Counselors must stay up to date in areas of technology to be better capable of tackling the first three challenging areas. Technology, through timesaving, connecting, and researching abilities, may reduce the effects of these issues on counseling programs (Paisley & McMahon). This may also be a vital tool for elementary counselors in Alaska where there are issues of isolated school sites which continue to be off the road system, but are linked through technology.

Professional school counselors are the main staff members within school communities who address the social and emotional needs of students, as well as connecting families with resources in the community. This is one reason why school counselors are an important piece in promoting student achievement. Additionally, each counseling program has unique needs. School counselors can identify what those needs are in their school community and with their stakeholders and then emphasize the activities best suited to achieve student success. The professional school counselor is an important source of support within the school for improving student achievement. Unfortunately, the significance of the counselor's role is often overlooked and counselors are asked to spend their time in non-counseling activities which do not work to provide the benefit that a more focused counseling program could for student success (Herr, 2002).

1.5 Defining the Counselor's Role

Professional school counselors have had a consistently changing and diverging role within school systems. Many school counselors are struggling to define their role within the school (Jones Sears & Haag Granello, 2002). Oftentimes, counselors are called upon to fulfill conflicting roles, such as confidant and disciplinarian with the same students (Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1994). As a result, it is imperative that school counselors find a way to clearly define their roles within the school building. Problems can arise from counselors that have unclear or undefined roles in their programs. One major conflict that occurs with undefined programs is that other professionals in the building as well as parents will believe that their agendas are then the priority of the

counseling program (Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein; Herr, 2001). This in turn, can lead to disappointment and criticism of the counselor and/or the counseling program.

Counselors not only struggle with role definition in the balance between personal/social and academic areas of the students' life, but also in what are appropriate tasks and duties for the counselor. Typical duties that become the responsibility of the school counselor which are outside the national model framework include such activities as master schedule duties, testing coordinators, detention room coverage, discipline, classroom coverage, and clerical responsibilities (American School Counselor Association, 2003). These are activities that do not require a master's degree to complete, thus the use of the school counselor in these duties is a misuse of school resources. Additionally, when counselors spend significant time on these types of activities they are taken away from counseling duties, which will in turn compromise their programs.

One of the central problems in the misuse of counselors' time is that these non-counseling activities are vital to the operation of the school and must be reassigned to the appropriate staff members. Reassignment often becomes a difficult task, yet if professional school counselors fill-up their schedules with non-counseling activities, not only is the program compromised but the counselor is viewed as non-professional (Madden, 2002). ASCA presents the comprehensive counseling program model as a framework for building counseling programs in a way that would assist counselors in eliminating these non-counseling activities. However, even with the professional literature as well as professional organizations and ADEED supporting a written and well developed guidance program which is implemented systematically to all students (Alaska

Department of Education and Early Development, 2006), not all counselors want to deliver a comprehensive guidance program and eliminate non-guidance activities (Larivee, 2002). Principals and counselors develop working roles for the school counselor that are comfortable and fill a valuable need within the school, which often both parties are not willing to reassign to non-counseling staff.

The comprehensive counseling program model presents that the systematic use of such a program allows school counselors to be able to identify and then jointly produce developmentally appropriate interventions with classroom teachers and as a result increase student success (Poynton & Carey, 2006). In many schools, the caseloads are simply too large for school counselors to effectively work with every student, and as such collaboration with teachers does become essential to an effective counseling program (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Whiston (2002) cautions against the over use of collaboration; he states that counselors are the professionals trained to deliver certain lessons and skill development and that should not be shifted onto teachers who may not be fully prepared to guide students in some areas.

Conversely, Sink (2008) stresses that counselors are not the central figure of the counseling program, more that they are the well educated professional in the area of collaboration to both directly and indirectly coordinate services for students which will in turn promote student success. Thus, it is argued that counselors do not need to directly deliver services in all cases for students to receive the benefits of the comprehensive counseling program. Additionally, when counselors are left on their own with the complete responsibility of the counseling program without involvement of other

stakeholders such as teachers, the program often turns to a more crises style program whereby the counselor is simply reacting to the next crisis (Myrick, 1987). This is a concern for elementary counselors in Alaska, caseloads are large and there is no coordinator for counseling programs within the state.

1.6 Addressing the Role Conflict

Counselors working in school sites may continue to experience an identity conflict, even with all the provided role definition support from professional associations. This occurs when there is a dissonance between what the counselor feels his or her role in the school community is and what is actually being asked of the counselor to perform. This sort of variance in role may possibly stem from school counselor programs being directed by non-counseling professionals, such as principals and assistant principals. A conflict arises when the principal's agenda does not take into consideration what the counselor's role should be within their building, as outlined by professional counseling associations, but rather is focused on what needs to be accomplished within the school (Culbreth et al., 2005; Fitch et al., 2001; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000).

Administrators are the professionals who lead the school team. They understand the needs and mission of the school; however, they do not always understand the role which the counselor should play within the team. The level of success achieved in developing an effective counseling program often depends on the amount of support received from the principal (Perusse et al., 2004). The need for principal support reinforces the need for collaboration and communication regarding job responsibilities and expectations not only with classroom teachers, but also with principals to promote

successful counseling programs in elementary schools. Gray and McCollum (2003) stress that counselors should not only be educated in the skills necessary to effectively implement counseling programs but should also be educated in how to develop a strong professional identity through understanding the philosophy that underlies their profession and to be able to effectively communicate this identity to other professionals.

One problem that occurs with school counseling programs is that each separate school encourages different types of guidance programs. Perusse et al. (2004) found in a national study with participants from the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, that out of the 1,111 respondents a clear definition of inappropriate and appropriate tasks for the professional school counselor could not be established; there was too much variability. The lack of ability to clearly outline the counselor's tasks is problematic when trying to develop the most effective programs or when new professionals join the school team; thus there is a clear need for outlined roles, duties and the mission of counseling programs (Herr, 2002).

A guide for a more clear definition of roles and duties is what the national model attempts to provide. Some elementary school counselors still find however that this model does not fit the needs of their specific communities and as such do not implement recommended practices or only do so on a limited basis (Larivee, 2002). Additionally, it is still possible that administrators are not aware that specific standards outlined in counseling models even exist to guide the school counseling programs; much less what

those standards are, thereby having a negative influence on how principals assign duties (Whiston, 2002).

In the nation-wide study by Perusse et al. (2004), researchers found support for their initial theory. The inappropriate tasks most frequently cited as being performed by counselors were also the tasks perceived by principals as proper duties of the counselor. A separate study of 86 principals in training at two Kentucky universities found similar results (Fitch et al., 2001). Future administrators in this study correctly prioritized counselor functions in accordance with comprehensive guidance program standards, however they also cited disciplinary, clerical and special education duties as the responsibility of the counselor. The findings from both of these studies demonstrate how principal perceptions guide a counseling program into non-counseling areas and affect the counselor's role within the school community.

Elementary school counselor role misperception is an occurrence that has been cited in studies of Alaska as well. In their 1973 report submitted to the Alaska Department of Education, Spaziani et al. (1973) had already identified that there existed significant differences in principals' and counselors' perceptions regarding the school counselors' role and the importance of counseling functions. It was suggested in that report that more organization was needed to develop a philosophy for guidance and counseling programs with measurable objectives and methods of operation as well as identifying an outlined method of evaluation. In order to accomplish these program improvements, elementary school counseling on the whole needs to have adequate funding (Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs, 2000).

School counselors have the potential to impact the school climate, school policies, and student achievement if allowed to fulfill their proper role within the school (Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Gray & McCollum, 2003). Additionally, counselors who are able to fulfill the roles which they attribute to their profession have been found to have a stronger professional identity (Henderson et al., 2007) and higher job satisfaction. Stronger senses of professional identity and increased job satisfaction could then in turn influence retention rates within schools and allow for more effective counseling programs (DeMato & Curcio, 2004).

Jones Sears and Haag Granello (2002) propose that part of the difficulty in establishing defined roles and professional identity for school counselors lies in the inconsistent and vague language used with this profession. The terms guidance counselor and professional school counselor are both used in the professional literature as well as developmental counseling programs and comprehensive counseling programs when speaking of school counselors and what they are doing within the school buildings. These authors purpose that this sort of inconsistency in terms demonstrates a lack of professional identity and furthers that lack of identity development by confusing administrators and other stake holders regarding the expected duties of the school counselor.

Essentially, guidance counseling was a historic term which has been replaced by professional school counseling; however, the term is still used in many cases and refers to the same position. Comprehensive counseling programs should be developmental in nature and thus be developmental, comprehensive counseling programs. The main

confusion enters when professionals without a counseling background are in charge of the counseling program and may not be familiar with the frequent interchangeability of many of these words. That is when counselors must be clear in their communications with other professionals regarding their role and the goals of the counseling program.

1.7 Summary

Whiston (2002) predicts that professional school counseling, as well as education in general, is in an era of change or reform. There has already been much change in school counseling since the first enrichment activities in high school core classes, both at the national level as well as within the state of Alaska. Much of this change has been due to social, political and economic issues confronting schools. Whiston theorizes that current times may become known as a significant critical period in professional school counseling history. Meaning that as professional school counselors have throughout their history changed to meet the needs of the students and communities in which they serve, they will need to continue to do so into the future (Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

Coy (1999) argues that school counselor roles should be determined at the district level in partnership with building administrators and that this role should be driven by needs assessments conducted with students and other stake holders such as parents, teachers, administrators and school board members. Similarly, Gysbers (1990) stated programs are not fixed entities once enacted; needs assessments and changes to meet those needs must continue if school counseling programs are to remain effective. ASCA contributes a method for defining the role of elementary school counselors through the use of a comprehensive counseling program model.

Most counseling programs are currently overseen by building administrators. These administrators traditionally have very little training in counseling issues; as a result, programs are not always developed with the premise of establishing the counselor's role through enhancing counseling duties and reducing non-counseling tasks. It then currently falls to each individual counselor to learn and communicate to the stakeholders at their school what a professional school counselor should be doing as well as how a comprehensive counseling program would function within each specific community culture.

Chapter 2

The Comprehensive Counseling Program

2.1 Introduction

The American School Counselors Association (ASCA) has presented the comprehensive counseling program national model as a framework for all counselors to use in developing their school counseling programs. The state of Alaska has adopted a version of the comprehensive counseling program for use with all elementary schools in the state which was built from the national model. Comprehensive counseling programs have specific standards for what a student should gain as a result of having been part of the program in areas of academic, career and personal/social domains, as well as, defining the specific duties and time allocations for counselors to reference when developing school counseling programs.

Additionally, comprehensive programs are designed to service all students in a developmentally appropriate manner rather than only those students who are either high achieving or at risk for school failure as more traditional programs have done. However, Whiston (2002) argues that professional school counselors are stretched too thin, that they try to do too many things with too large of case loads and school counselors will have to make difficult decisions about what their role is within the school if they hope to have an effective program. As counselors are being asked to take on larger case loads, with student to counselor ratios being so extreme, counselors cannot expect to serve all students. This directly conflicts with the main tenants of the comprehensive school

counseling program theory in which all students have direct access to the counseling program.

Comprehensive programs should have clear outlines and objectives which support the mission of both the counseling program and the school. Counselors using comprehensive programs should be planning and implementing specific, empirically supported, interventions through four main components of the delivery system: guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support (Gysbers & Henderson, 2002). All of the interventions in each of the component areas are focused on facilitating success in one or more of the academic, career, or personal/social areas of student development.

2.2 Main Components of the Comprehensive Counseling Program

ASCA developed the national model for comprehensive guidance programs in 2003, which was influenced strongly by the professional works and writings of Norman Gysbers and Pat Henderson, Sharon and Curly Johnson, and Robert Myrick (American School Counselor Association, 2003). It is proposed that comprehensive counseling programs should be proactive rather than reactive (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007; Fitch & Marshall, 2004). Programs should be developed to assist every student to further his/her development.

The professional school counselor should be familiar with student standards when developing the counseling program as well as how to support students in a developmentally appropriate manner. Taking this theme of appropriate interventions a step further to meet the needs of Alaska elementary school counseling programs,

counselors will need to be familiar with the culture of the community in which they are employed. When school personnel respect students' culture, it assists students to become successful learners in a multicultural society (Morotti, 2006).

An important concept in comprehensive programs is that they are needs-driven programs that promote the success of every child in the school (Bowers, Hatch & Schwallie-Giddis, 2001), but in a proactive manner. Programs should be designed to be developmentally appropriate as well as relevant to individual students (MacDonald & Sink, 1999). Areas of differences between more traditional programs and comprehensive programs include such things as traditional programs minimize the use of group work and assign large amounts of clerical responsibilities to the counselor while the comprehensive program extensively utilizes group work and focuses on direct service with students, staff, and families (Schmidt, 2004). More recently, there have been introductions of other counseling approaches (i.e., school-based family counseling) that incorporate different approaches (Morotti, 2008), which were not available when comprehensive counseling programs were being developed.

The use of little group work and emphasizing clerical responsibilities in more traditional programs may be in part due to the historical duties in which high school counselors were responsible for in the earlier years of the profession; elementary counseling came about later. Holcomb-McCoy, Bryan and Rahill (2002) found in a study with school counselors that elementary counselors rated counseling and guidance knowledge and skills as more important than did high school counselors. The authors speculated that the difference in rating may be due to more individual and group

counseling activities at the elementary level being conducted on a daily basis or possibly because of different developmental needs at the elementary school level.

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (ADEED) states that elementary school counselors in this state will assist all students in the areas of their academic, career, and personal/social development (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2006). The ADEED also gives outlines for the needed educational requirements of a school counselor as well as competencies for the counselor and the counseling program. Professional school counselors are expected to follow a national model, *American School Counselor Association's National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs*, when designing their programs.

To facilitate results that are in line with goals, comprehensive guidance programs include four main components: guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. The components are delivered within a framework of three main student competency areas: academic, career, and personal/social areas (Gysbers & Henderson, 2002). From this, standards were formed with the premise that comprehensive programs would help all students to be successful learners (Perusse, Goodnough & Noel, 2001). These student standards assisted professionals in identifying a loose set of goals to aim their programs towards and also stress a need for developmentally appropriate interventions at all grade levels, thus reinforcing the need for elementary school counselors to provide prevention and early intervention with students. Counselors should be able to track each of the tasks that they conduct within

their program to one of these four components and one or more of the three student competency areas (see Appendix A, pg. 144).

In addition to the four component areas in the delivery system of the comprehensive counseling program, there are four broader elements to establishing a program that must be developed first, which the delivery system is just a part: foundation, delivery system, management system and accountability. The foundation part of the program outlines the basic philosophy of the counseling program, which would include a written mission statement that describes the program's purpose and communicates the vision for the counseling program to stakeholders such as parents, teachers, administrators and school board representatives (American School Counselor Association, 2003). After a foundation is established, the program must have a delivery system; this is where the four main components of the comprehensive program are developed.

The last two broad based elements in implementing comprehensive guidance programs include a management system and accountability. The management part of guidance programs is where counselors involve stakeholders in identifying the goals and responsibilities of the program. An example of an activity in the management system is that of instituting advisory councils. Advisory councils should be made up of a representative sample of the stakeholders (e.g. parents, students, teachers, administrators, and counselors). Unfortunately it can be very time consuming and labor intensive to secure parent involvement in the school and the counseling program (Cuthbert, 2002), especially when seeking a formal meeting style contribution. Finally, accountability helps

counselors to see if programs are being effective; if students are actually benefiting from being part of the counseling program (American School Counselor Association, 2003).

Focusing back in on the delivery system, the basic structure of how a program gets implemented is outlined in this area of the comprehensive counseling program. In the delivery system, counselors provide services which can be grouped into the four basic areas: guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services and system support. It is purposed by Rowley, Stroh and Sink (2005) that the guidance curriculum component area may contribute more significantly towards aligning comprehensive counseling programs with the mission of schools than any of the other three component areas. However, each component area has specific tasks and time allocations for elementary counselors to use when designing their own programs.

In the guidance curriculum area, services are delivered in a group format through systematic and developmentally appropriate classroom lessons which target student growth in the areas of academic, career, and personal/social development. Skills which have been identified as being beneficial in the natural development of students are specifically taught to all students. One way that academic development can be addressed in the counseling program is through collaboration with the classroom teacher regarding the guidance curriculum component area. However, collaboration with teachers does not need to be limited to the guidance curriculum component or the academic focus area. Communicating and working effectively with teachers can benefit students in all areas of their development (Clark & Amatea, 2004; Shoffner & Briggs, 2001).

The national model gives specific time allocations for elementary school counselors which differ from other levels of the educational system. ASCA suggests that counselors at the elementary school level should spend the majority of their time in the guidance curriculum component area; a 35 to 45 percent as opposed to the high school level which recommends 15 to 25 percent (American School Counselor Association, 2003). The percentage of time spent in individual planning is also different for elementary school counselors than it is for counselors at other levels of the educational system. ASCA recommends that elementary school counselors spend five to 10 percent of their time on this component which is significantly less than a high school counselor would spend in this area (American School Counselor Association).

Individual student planning can be delivered in a one-on-one interaction or in a small group format. This intervention helps students to plan, evaluate and establish personal goals for their academic, career and personal futures. Individual student planning can be a very valuable tool in transitioning students to their next level of education. One-on-one student planning and transitioning were the basic areas in which counselors operated in the early years of the profession when career counseling was the predominate function of school counselors, and still remains a component area with strong emphasis at the high school level.

The responsive services component involves several subcomponents. In this area of the comprehensive guidance program, counselors will deliver individual and small group counseling with students. They may also provide crisis counseling or help to develop peer mediation. The main functions of school counselors are to provide students,

faculty and parents with consultation and coordination as well as counseling, which also occur in the responsive services component area. ASCA recommends that the elementary school counselor spend approximately 30 to 40 percent of their time in activities which fall into the responsive services component area. This component area matches more closely across the educational levels than the previous two component areas. The recommended time allocation is not very different at the elementary level than the expectations at the middle school and high school levels of counseling (American School Counselor Association, 2003).

While most of the activities associated with consulting and coordinating are provided in the system support component area, there are some that fall within the responsive services component such as providing referrals for students and their families to community resources. In a study concerning counselors' role, Burnham and Jackson (2000) surveyed 80 professional school counselors. Findings from that study suggest an over reliance on individual counseling which elevated the percentage of time spent in responsive services beyond what is recommended. It is postulated by these authors that this over use of individual work occurred because counselors are trained predominately in individual counseling skills, thus feeling more prepared and confident in this area.

Burnham and Jackson (2000) suggest that counselor programs should incorporate training activities designed to enhance flexibility, objectivity and relationship-building qualities in student counselors. These skills are thought to assist in preparing counselors to be more comfortable in the other delivery areas of the comprehensive guidance program. There are many ways suggested by the authors to address gaining these skills,

including job shadowing, role-playing and seminars focused on job roles within the school building (Holowiak-Urquhart & Taylor, 2005). Additionally, helping counseling students to understand that there will inevitably be a difference between the ideal and the reality in their counseling programs may reduce role stress (Culbreth et al., 2005). In turn, reduced role stress could assist counselors to feel more comfortable delivering services in all the component areas.

The system support component area also has many subcomponents. In the system support area counselors address professional development through in-service trainings, professional association memberships and contributing to the professional literature in the area of school counseling. Publishing in the area of the counselor's expertise has been found to be an activity in which school counselors do not traditionally engage with any significance as compared with academicians (Weinrach et al., 1998) but which should be conducted according to the national model provided by ASCA. The framework gives a broad directive of contributing to the professional literature; however, specific support in how counselors who are already overburdened with counseling and non-counseling tasks alike are going to accomplish publishing is not provided. The same is true of professional development within the state of Alaska; there are limited opportunities for counselors outside of the three main urban areas of Alaska to receive trainings.

In the system support component area, counselors also perform tasks of consultation, collaboration and coordination. Additionally, there is some overlap between the delivery system and the management system in this component area with a separate management task within the system support component of the delivery system. Focusing

on the management tasks within the system support component it is shown that this is where counselors determine that the goals they set for the program are being carried out as well as other planning and support activities. The system support component area has very similar counselor time allocations at all levels of the educational system. The recommendation is that elementary school counselors spend 10 to 15 percent of their time in the system support component area (American School Counselor Association, 2003) (see Appendix F, pg. 150).

Given that there are challenges when implementing programs, the actual daily activities of counselors may not follow best practice guidelines set forth through national and state standards (Culbreth et al., 2005). Bradford (1993) found in a study of 95 elementary school counselors that a significant expression of need for training that was more directly tied with their daily role activities was present. In this study the respondents were primarily female and were employed in urban or suburban areas. Each participant in this study completed a 44 question survey, which examined five different counselor roles and corresponding preparation areas. The roles consisted of coordinating activities, consultation, counseling, a teacher role, and manager. Counselors in this study were randomly divided into two groups where actual or ideal role duties were examined. No significant difference was found between these two groups based on the demographic variables, thus it is assumed by the author that the groups were evenly matched.

The previously listed role areas for Bradford's (1993) study correspond with the Alaska state standards as follows, coordinating activities, consultation and manager, as they are defined for this study fall within the area of system support; counseling is

relevant to responsive services; and a teacher role with guidance curriculum. This study did not appear to address directly the individual planning area, however there were several topics within each role that could possibly go into many distribution areas. Significant findings for Bradford's study were in the area of consultant or as related with the national standards, system support, as well as in the role of teacher or as otherwise defined as the guidance curriculum component area.

Bradford (1993) found that counselors felt that parent groups and in-service workshops with faculty were important; however, they did not actually perform these activities to the same level as their importance. This suggests that system support areas which should occupy 10 to 15 percent of the counselor's time are either not as developed as they should be; counselors are indicating an over inflated need for performing tasks in this area; or as the authors in this study suggest counselor preparatory programs are not adequately preparing school counselors for the tasks required in this area of job duties. The main finding in this study is that the role of teacher, which is comparatively similar to the component area of guidance curriculum and should occupy the largest section of the counselor's time, presented as the most significant difference between perceived and actual duties performed. Bradford suggests that counselor educators focus more training on actual group work to provide the necessary skills for counselors to perform their daily job duties to a desired level.

A study by Fitch and Marshall (2004) looked at the activities of school counselors in both high achieving and lower achieving schools, as based on testing scores of students. This study found that counselors in high achieving schools did not differ

significantly from those at low achieving schools in the importance that they assigned to different counseling duties. Counselors from high achieving schools did differ in the actual hours reported on various counseling duties performed however; specifically in the areas of program management, evaluation and research, and adhering to professional standards and coordination activities. Counselors from higher achieving schools reported spending more time devoted to these previously outline activities. Conversely, counselors from lower-achieving schools report a greater perceived importance with regards to student advocacy activities.

The results from the study conducted by Fitch and Marshall (2004) relates with the system support category in the comprehensive guidance program, which only demands 10 to 15 percent of the counselor's time. The system support category did not even rate as second in the time counselors in this study spent on the specific component areas, it was a small but significant component area for supporting the comprehensive counseling program. It appears that the how and what of what the counselor did within the system support component area influenced student achievement, according to how the researchers interpreted the data. It should also be considered, however, that counselors were able to conduct the system support activities because the students were performing with higher academic testing scores and time did not need to be spent in more remedial areas. Another finding from this study is that counselors both from high achieving and low achieving schools rated non-counseling activities as occupying a majority of their time.

Further, a study done by Foster, Young and Hermann (2005) looked to identify and describe the work activities currently being performed by school counselors. This study specifically examined student development in the three areas addressed by national standards: academic, career, and personal or social development. The data were taken from information collected by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC). This study found five items to be of most importance in promoting the academic area of student competency. Those items were general school counseling, facilitating student development of decision making skills, identifying students' support systems, promoting healthy life style choices, and planning and conducting classroom guidance lessons. These items were also ranked the highest for frequency of performance (Foster, Young & Hermann). These items all fall within the individual planning and the curriculum categories with regard to the *Alaska Comprehensive Guidance Program Standard for Public Schools* which is built from the national model (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2006). Combined, these two categories should occupy between 40 and 55 percent of the school counselor's time, thus it is expected that these items would rank as most frequent.

In the Foster, Young and Hermann (2005) study, the area of academic development was found to be most congruent with national standards, while counselor activities in the areas of promoting career or personal/social development were not necessarily being performed with the frequency or importance that is suggested by the national standards. The overlap in rating items as high in both frequency and importance through out this study suggests that either professional school counselors at the national

level are actively performing tasks that are viewed as important or that school counselors are rating activities that they perform frequently as important. Either way, the tasks that are being performed fall in-line with expectations according to comprehensive guidance program guides and student standards in the area of academic achievement only.

2.3 Implementing the Comprehensive Counseling Program

Implementing a comprehensive counseling program is proposed as the best practice for school counselors (American School Counselor Association, 2003; Gysbers, 1990; Rowley, Stroh & Sink, 2005). ASCA's national model for comprehensive counseling programs has integrated the key elements of leading professionals' contribution in the field of school counseling. It provides a framework for delivering guidance and counseling services to students in a way that maximizes student achievement (American School Counselor Association). It is proposed that by using a developmentally appropriate and systemic approach to deliver services to all students, not just those who are high-achieving or at-risk, is the best way for counselors to implement counseling programs (Hatch & Bowers, 2002).

Professional school counselors are in a position to be both counselors and educators (Henderson et al., 2007; Paisley et al., 2007). In elementary schools during current times, students will face many challenges which could influence their achievement in all areas and counselors are trained professionals available to offer support within the school. It is argued that doing so with planning and intention builds a stronger counseling program and offers a better service to the school community.

Jones Sears and Haag Granello (2002) argue that the context in which a school counseling program is delivered impacts the effectiveness of the intervention; meaning that there are environmental factors affecting students' success outside of the school building such as poverty, violence, and stressed family situations. These are factors which the school counselor is in a unique position within the school to address and which may serve as significant obstacles to student success (Walsh, Barrett & DePaul, 2007). Additionally, identified risk factors for school success which many students face are being observed as on the rise in the United States (Paisley et al., 2007). It is important when counselors are looking at implementing a comprehensive guidance program that the counselor does not forget about socio-developmental based interventions which could positively affect students encountering these environmental factors (Sink, 2002).

There are also factors from within the school building that contribute to the context in which the counseling program is provided such as lack of funds for programs, lack of faculty or building space or deteriorating buildings (Jones Sears & Haag Granello, 2002). When implementing a comprehensive counseling program the counselor must involve other school personnel in the process if the program is to become successful. The counseling program needs administrator as well as other stake holder support to effectively handle challenges which present during implementation. This is especially true when one counselor has been assigned to more than one school, as often happens in Alaska, or when there is a lack of funding. If a proactive, developmentally based, comprehensive counseling program is to be effectively implemented stakeholders and counselors must work as a team (Myrick, 1987).

Taking the multiple challenges that could potentially impact the implementation of a comprehensive program into consideration, counselors must first perform a needs assessment and begin the involvement of stakeholders. It is not expected that counselors will implement change to introduce a comprehensive program all at once. In fact, that is not recommended, but rather a five-step change process. This process is intended to take place over a three to five year time span (Gysbers & Henderson, 2002). The first step is to plan the program. In this phase of implementation, the counselor would be developing time lines and making estimations about where the program is currently and where the program should be after implementation. There are planning and preparatory activities which must occur, as well as the time and task analyses and other activities which guide and assist in implementing effective programs (American School Counselor Association, 2003).

After the basic planning of the program has been completed, the foundation must be developed. In this phase of implementation, the counselor conducts needs assessments, gathers school data, and identifies school strengths and weaknesses among other tasks (American School Counselor Association, 2003). The counselor is building a strong base from which to launch the counseling program. The third phase is closely related to the second phase. In the second step of implementing a comprehensive counseling program, counselors are building a broad base for their program. In the third, the counselor is narrowing that focus to just one area of the program: the delivery system. In this phase, the counselor will identify which curricula s/he will use for meeting specific student

standards and prioritize the interventions. Counselors will also establish time allocations which should align with ASCA's national model for time spent in each component area.

The fourth step of implementing a comprehensive counseling program is where the counselor actually implements the program. The first three steps have all consisted of planning and preparing to implement the program; in this step the program actually is implemented. It is during this phase of implementation in which counselors will want to develop strong support for the program and involvement from stake holders. Counselors will also want to develop both their calendar of anticipated interventions or activities and the counseling program budget (American School Counseling Association, 2003).

After the comprehensive counseling program has been planned and then implemented, counselors then must turn their attention to the fifth step which is program accountability. In this step counselors monitor the program and collect data results. Counselors share those results with stakeholders and use them to cycle back to the planning stage and implement the most effective programs. It is also during this step that counselors are charged with continuing their professional development which will strengthen programs (American School Counseling Association, 2003). All of these steps taken to implement successful comprehensive counseling programs also serve to reduce challenges and bolster strengths in the school counseling program. This five-step model is outlined for implementing the program at a particular site. There are no steps or guidance on how an elementary school counselor who is split between many site locations or visits a site only a few days a month are to implement comprehensive programs.

Sink and Yilik-Downer (2001) found in a national study focusing on how school counselors viewed their comprehensive guidance and counseling programs that newer counselors held more anxiety about implementing a comprehensive program. Those counselors who had less than five years experience felt that collaboration was an essential part of implementing a program. Sink and Yilik-Downer proposed that their research indicated a need for more experienced counselors to work with newer counselors in developing their own programs. It was also found in this study that there was a relationship between how involved counselors are in developing their programs and the importance it holds with them; a sense of ownership in the program. This gives support, especially in areas of high turn-over in school staff, for a mentoring program where more experienced staff can assist newer counselors.

Brigman and Campbell (2003) and Webb, Brigman, and Campbell (2005), when conducting research to provided links between school counselor interventions and student academic achievement, decided that the first step in this research process should be to address the needs of the counselor. The professional school counselors in these studies were not only provided with a specific intervention curricula to use, but were also connected to a mentoring relationship, and provided with research showing effectiveness for what they would be implementing. This reinforces the expectation that perception influences results but also that those counselors working in a mentoring relationship are believed to be better equipped to deliver guidance interventions to students.

There is a need for counselors to join together in support of each other through mentoring and supervision which in turn provides a benefit to students through the

development of an effective comprehensive counseling program. Culbreth et al. (2005) found that role stress could be reduced and counseling skills enhanced through a supervisory relationship, which then benefits students. Additionally, professional school counselor role identity can be strengthened through involvement with other professional counselors (Henderson et al., 2007). Mentoring and supervision are important for new counselors; however, neither is required for certification purposes. Interestingly, the Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Alaska must engage in supervised work experience after the completion of his or her degree program, yet the professional school counselor has no such requirement or system support.

2.4 Evaluating the Comprehensive Counseling Program

To assist in ensuring the future of school counseling specific things have been suggested by the professional literature. Research into demonstrating that the counseling programs are effective is an essential first step in this era of accountability within the educational field (Bauman et al., 2003; Whiston, 2002). Counselors must not only demonstrate what they are doing but how students are receiving positive outcomes from having been part of the counseling program. To do this, counselors will need to be comfortable with evaluation techniques (Green & Keys, 2001).

It is important that accountability should be viewed in the sense of whether or not interventions for a particular purpose are being effective and not in terms of whether counselors are doing a good job (Myrick, 2003). The later only leads to defensiveness and a resistance to evaluating programs. Accountability, when referring to comprehensive counseling programs, is essentially a three pronged concept of examining the goals that

focused the program, implementation of chosen interventions and the results of those interventions. This format allows counselors to involve stakeholders in accountability as being responsible for the school counseling program and foster the view of the school counselor as part of the whole school team (Myrick).

Evaluation is one tool that school counselors have to gauge the effectiveness of the counseling program at the elementary level as well as other levels of the educational system. The first step, in the three pronged approach, is to determine that there indeed exists a written program and that this program is being implemented as intended. This is referred to as program evaluation. The second part in assessing effectiveness of the guidance program calls for a detailed job description or role assignment for the school counselor and other guidance personnel so that evaluation forms may be created. In this step personnel evaluation is being conducted. Thirdly, results evaluations of the impact that each of the four component areas of the guidance program have had must be conducted. There needs to be a connection drawn between the activities of the counselor (i.e., guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services and system support) and the achievements of students. Thus with program evaluation, personnel evaluation, and results evaluation, it is proposed by leading professionals in the field that the school counselor will be able to assess whether their program is being effective in promoting student success (Gysbers, 2001a).

Program evaluation is an on-going process used to improve services and a tool used in meet goals outlined in the comprehensive guidance program. In program evaluation, it is determined whether there is a plan written for achieving student success.

When counselors involve stake holders, or persons with an investment in the school such as teachers, administrators, parents or school board members, with the process of evaluation and the plan for student success, they are building support for their programs (Johnson & Whitfield, 1991). According to Gysbers (2001a) the main benefits derived from providing the evidence of program effectiveness are the ability to continue providing benefits to students that a comprehensive program offers and an increase of support from parents, administration and other professionals.

A basic and effective framework for evaluating the personnel piece of the comprehensive guidance program is through a time and task analysis with regards to time spent in the four main component areas within the national model (Maliszewski & Mackiel, 2002). This model suggests a targeted percentage of the counselor's time which should be spent in each area. A simple comparison can be conducted for implementation evaluation purposes; however, it only tells us what a counselor is doing, not how students are benefiting from having been part of the program (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2001; Johnson & Johnson, 2003). This leaves us to look to results-based data which outlines specific activities that have been implemented within the component areas and demonstrates how students have gained from these activities in their academic, career or personal/social areas of development.

Results-based forms of evaluation can include pre- and post-intervention evaluations as well as other types of assessment and are more intensive and lengthy. One concern is that without experience or resources to conduct these types of evaluations counselors can become frustrated and overwhelmed by evaluation attempts (Maliszewski

& Mackiel, 2002). Studer (2006) suggests that counselors need a simple tool with which to perform assessment of the counseling program. In a study conducted with 28 school counselors in a large urban area in the southwest United States it was shown that counselors need a practical and simple evaluation method (Astramovich, Coker & Hoskins, 2005).

Factors which may inhibit counselors from performing evaluations include such things as fears about confidentiality, concern about how results will be used, and a belief that evaluations are not needed (Studer, 2006). Additionally, with the traditional focus of punitive reasons when conducting evaluations combined with the belief that large scale intensive operations by professional evaluators is needed, counselors often avoid the evaluation process (Astramovich & Coker, 2007). The reality is that evaluating school guidance programs for effectiveness has become an essential part of the professional counselor's duties in this era of accountability for schools. The use of data is proposed as a way to assist the professional counselor in not only identifying areas of success and concern, but also to evaluate the effectiveness of remediation plans as well (Poynton & Carey, 2006) it can be used as a tool for planning more effective programs.

2.5 Flexibility of the Comprehensive Counseling Program

The national model for comprehensive guidance programs, provided by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), and adopted for use by many states, gives a framework for developing programs. It provides time allocations for how the counselor spends his or her time. It provides an outline for what a counselor will be responsible for through the four main component areas of the delivery system, and it

provides for what a student should gain (i.e., student standards) after having been part of the counseling program. School counselors are expected to use this guide as well as the mission statement of their school and the needs identified by their stakeholders to form a comprehensive program which will meet the needs of all students. The flexibility within the structure ideally allows for the national model to be applicable to all settings of delivery, though it is not specifically outlined how counselors who face the challenges of ratios well above recommendations or who operate as itinerate counselors for many schools are to adapt the program to meet these special challenges.

Baggerly and Borkowski (2004) demonstrate how using strategic interventions within a comprehensive program adapts the counseling program for unique challenges in a case study with a homeless student in an urban setting. ASCA's national model was used to provide a framework of standards from which to choose interventions. Strategic group and individual interventions were then planned, implemented, and evaluated for success based on the core areas of the comprehensive guidance program standards for student achievement. The authors proposed that as a result of these interventions the student showed improvements in behavior, was more attentive to school work, and less disruptive to other students. Thus it is suggested that using strategic intervention within the framework of a comprehensive program can benefit the targeted student(s) as well as providing benefits to other students in the classroom.

In another study of one hundred eighty students at the elementary level who were performing academically below average, Brigman and Campbell (2003) provided specific strategic interventions for counselors to use with students in a group format. Evidence

from this study persuaded the researchers that the behavioral improvements were directly connected with academic improvements for students. Two years later, Webb, Brigman and Campbell (2005) conducted a follow-up study which held the same results as the first, further emphasizing the need for strategic interventions within a comprehensive guidance program. These studies were conducted in Florida and participants were chosen who fell between the 25th and 60th percentile on the states norm-referenced test (i.e., Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test). Another study involving elementary school counselors in Boston demonstrated that comprehensive counseling programs based on specific standards and interventions can be successfully implemented in urban areas faced with many social challenges (Walsh, Barrett & DePaul, 2007).

The national model provided by the ASCA takes an integrated approach to addressing the diverse needs of student populations. For example, it is purposed that the guidance curriculum component area can be used to further cultural knowledge for all students thus addressing student diversity from a system wide approach (Wittmer, 2000). It is believed that increasing cultural knowledge will assist students in understanding and respecting diversity in their fellow student and increasing acceptance thus reducing behavioral concerns in this area.

Other component areas of the national model, specifically the individual planning component area, can be used to address the needs of a diverse student body. Cunanan and Maddy-Bernstein (1994) argue that many students, especially from diverse backgrounds, have limited exposure to career role models. Counselors have a unique opportunity to educate and guide students in their career exploration and career identities. This allows

for counselors to assist students with career awareness and readiness which will facilitate personal goal achievement, which is a student competency standard identified within the national model (American School Counselor Association, 2003).

Coy (1999) states that in order for students to effectively learn that the challenges which may interfere with their learning must first be addressed. Many times the diverse needs of students are not being met with interventions that were designed for a white, middle class population (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Three common challenges which are facing families in the 21st century include economic/work force changes; movements between rural, urban and suburban environments; and changes in social pressures on societal values and norms (Gysbers, 2001b). In Alaska, there are these common nation-wide challenges as well as specific ones such as isolation and multicultural influences on students.

Professional school counseling has the potential to personalize the educational process for many students (Dinkmeyer & Caldwell, 1970). Clark (1987) argues that school counselors should be advocates for students. The counselor is in a position to remove barriers which stand between the student and success in both academic and personal areas. This is especially important when meeting the needs of students in diverse settings or backgrounds. Counselors are often trained in more typical Eurocentric approaches and may not necessarily recognize the help seeking behaviors of diverse groups (Holcomb-McCoy, 2000). This lack of training lends itself to one of the reasons why ASCA suggests proactive, developmentally and culturally appropriate, systemic guidance in delivering an effective counseling program to all students. Comprehensive

guidance programs should be shaped by student needs and strengths while taking learning styles and other individual differences into effect (Clark); thus meeting the needs of students in diverse settings.

Wittmer (2000) proposes that school counselors can assist faculty, students and stakeholders within the school community to value diversity in others. Walsh, Barrett and DePaul (2007) write that setting goals in-line with standards facilitates a culture of tolerance and respect for individual differences, thus assisting all students in their development. Each school counseling program has unique needs. Counselors should identify what those needs are in their school community and then emphasize the activities best suited to meet those needs. Professional school counselors are in a unique position within the school to set a climate of safety and support from which students are better able to overcome risk factors (Holowiak-Urquhart & Taylor, 2005). The counselor is an important source of support for improving student achievement.

2.6 Strengths and Challenges in Delivery

Education has undergone changes throughout the last century. Often times, counseling programs have simply added new responsibilities when these societal and educational changes occurred rather than implementing a new program to address the changing needs of students and stakeholders (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). Typically, school counselors are one of the few professionals in the school building who have training in both mental health issues and education (American School Counseling Association, 2003). Thus, school counselors are the ones to take on added tasks in the

effort to assist students to achieve success within the school, when changing how the counseling program operates rather than how hard is really the task at hand.

The level of success achieved in developing an effective counseling program often depends on the amount of support received from the building principal (Perusse et al., 2004). Monteiro-Leitner et al. (2006) found in a survey study involving counselors, counselors in training, and principals in rural settings that all three groups differed on their perceptions of what counselors should do and what they actually do. One theme that continuously emerged throughout the groups is that of counselors engaging in non-counseling duties. All groups recognized that it occurs to different levels, and concern was raised as to the best use of a counselor's time and abilities; which speaks to an awareness of a problem but not to a solution. Implementing a comprehensive counseling program requires the whole school team to be supportive and involved in order to successfully assist students in the areas of their academic, career and personal/social development. Additionally, not only the immediate stakeholders, but also state and national level support for implementing comprehensive programs must occur in order to effectively do so in sites which are under-funded, under-staffed and isolated.

Due to differences in training and roles within the school community, principals and school counselors often approach student concerns very differently. This is understandable considering they have very different roles on the school team, yet it creates a challenge in implementing school counseling programs. Taking a collaborative approach can be beneficial to not only the student(s) involved, but also to the professionals, by means of reducing conflict and using available resources to problem

solve in a more effective manner. The key to administrators and counselors facilitating this move towards collaboration lies with opening up communication between the two parties (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000).

In a joint study by the Kentucky Association of School Administrators and the Appalachia Educational Laboratory effective elementary guidance programs were identified and contacted to become participants in a multi-state study of key elements contributing to their success. Collaboration with other school staff and high visibility of the counselor were both identified as contributing factors. Interestingly, 95 percent of the counselors mentioned the principal's support as a key resource which contributes significantly to the effectiveness of their programs (Sattes & Miller, 1989). It is important for the principal to learn the roles and functions of school counselors so that they may better utilize the resources of the school effectively and become better leaders (Lieberman, 2004). This also reduces the challenges counselors face in implementing comprehensive counseling programs.

Lehr and Sumarah (2002) conducted research in Novia Scotia regarding implementing comprehensive counseling programs at the elementary, middle and high school levels. This study involved survey and interview data from counselors who were at various stages of program implementation. Lehr and Sumarah looked to discover satisfaction levels and concerns with implementing comprehensive programs as well as needs or recommendations for the successful implementation. The majority, 87 percent, indicated a positive perception of overall success in implementing their programs. The main concerns identified by counselors while undergoing this process included needing

more time and resources for planning and delivering the program itself and the requirement for support and involvement from stakeholders.

Counselors who were satisfied with their programs indicated that the support they received from administrators and teachers was influential, while those who were dissatisfied reported the inverse; lack of support and involvement created a more difficult environment for implementing comprehensive counseling programs. A key concept in this research is that support in and of itself is not adequate, there needs to be involvement from stakeholders, such as teachers, school board representatives and parents. They must take ownership in the counseling program as belonging to students, administrators, teachers, parents and other stakeholders as well as to the counselor. This becomes even more of a concern when counselors are trying to implement comprehensive counseling programs in a situation where the counselor is assigned to more than one school.

Counselors must involve stakeholders and become very visible in the school building with their programs (Myrick, 2003). What teachers expect and their knowledge of the counselor's role can impact students, parents, administrators and even the counseling program itself. One of the major roles that school counselors have as part of a comprehensive counseling program is that of consultant; more specifically counselors consult with the teachers in their school buildings (Clark & Amatea, 2004).

Sink (2008) suggests that counselors and teachers should be working collaboratively for student achievement. When school counselors work together as a team with the other professionals in the school, they can help create a safe and positive learning environment where parents and students feel invested in the success process.

Using a comprehensive guidance program, it is argued that school counselors may be able to jointly produce developmentally appropriate interventions with teachers in a classroom environment (Poynton & Carey, 2006). Additionally, teachers may become better able to identify and refer students in need of extra support as a result of the working relationship developed with the school counselor, a point of strength when implementing comprehensive counseling programs.

A study conducted by Clark and Amatea (2004) show results from interviews with 28 teachers regarding the role of the school counselor. The researchers presented teachers with three basic questions. Teachers were asked what the guidance and counseling needs of their school were and how the counselor could meet these needs. They were asked what types of services the school counselors engage in and what things that the teacher would like counselors to do. Additionally, they were asked what types of helpful strategies counselors might be able to use in delivering services.

Findings from Clark and Amatea's (2004) study revealed three main themes. The first main theme that emerged from this work was that teachers perceive counselor-teacher communication and teamwork as most important. The second theme that resulted from this research was that teachers valued small-group counseling and classroom guidance lessons. Individual counseling came in as a close second to small-group and classroom guidance as a major theme for importance in defining the school counselor's role within the school building. The third theme gathered from this research was that of visibility. The school counselor was expected to be visible within the school building as well as bridging the gap between school and home.

Teacher consultation is thought to be one of the main elements in promoting student success. One reason for this belief in consultation as a line to student success is that counselors rely on teachers to refer those students who are struggling in some way. Confusion about what a school counselor's duties are or what the comprehensive counseling program's goals are can impact a teacher's decision to refer and as such deprive a student of needed services. Unfortunately, most training programs for future teachers and counselors do not expose each to the other's role within the school community. Thus communication with teachers becomes a key factor as well for ensuring an effective counseling program. Counselors must clearly communicate their roles and duties to teachers while maintaining regular communication to receive referrals (Astramovich & Loe, retrieved 2008; Clark & Amatea, 2004).

The expectations and support or lack thereof from administrators and teachers can present as a strength or a challenge to building comprehensive counseling programs and can impact the implementation of the program. Additionally, what the counselor expects when implementing a comprehensive program has influence on the program's effectiveness. One study conducted by Holcomb-McCoy, Bryan and Rahill (2002) found that professional school counselors rated program development, implementation, and evaluation as the lowest of importance with regards to the component areas to choose from on the survey. This does not imply that the respondents to this survey feel that program development, implementation, and evaluation are unimportant, but rather that they are not as important as other aspects of the school counseling program; which hinders developing effective comprehensive counseling programs and may lead to the

large percent of variance in counseling programs. Additionally, if counselors do not value or utilize program evaluation and development, this can be a significant challenge in implementing comprehensive counseling programs, but can be understood in a context of counselors who may work in less than ideal conditions for implementing comprehensive counseling programs.

ASCA national standards for school counseling programs were created in large part as a response to education reform legislations and agendas (Dahir, 2001). Academic reform legislations often do not address the social, emotional and economic challenges that many students face (American School Counselor Association, 2004); however these are areas that are critical for students in reaching academic success. Legislation does not always promote the development of school counseling, as some professionals fear that legislation which enhances funding for staff such as behavioral interventionists or drug/alcohol interventionists within the school system directly threatens the work that counselors are supposed to be doing (Paisley & Borders, 1995). Whether legislation increases funding and thus aids counseling programs, increases funding in other areas and threatens programs, or simply leaves off counseling programs all together, the fact is that legislation is a challenge that professional school counselors must continually face in implementing effective counseling programs.

2.7 Delivering Student Achievement

One way that comprehensive programs assist counselors in planning for student success is through the use of student standards in the areas of academic, career and personal/social domains as outlined by ASCA. Each standard then has several

competencies and indicators which assist in demonstrating that the student has achieved the area. These standards, competencies and indicators serve as an outline for counselors to focus interventions on developmentally appropriate areas of student learning, attitudes and skill acquisition.

There is no set number of standards or competencies that are required to determine if a guidance program is fully in place, but rather there should be enough standards in place that the program is effective in meeting the needs of all students (Gysbers, 2001a). Each of the standards for the student competencies revolve around several basic key themes. Students will gain attitudes, skills, knowledge and awareness of options with specific regards to academic, career and personal/social goals of development. Students will also form understandings of relationships between things, events and/or persons that will assist in their development as well as providing a basis for developing purposeful planning in their lives.

At present, even though leaders in the profession support comprehensive counseling programs (Gysbers, 2001a), there are other professionals who argue that there is little research that directly shows causal relationships to student achievement. One thing that has been suggested is perceptions about student achievement cannot be linked with comprehensive guidance programs (Sink & Stroh, 2003). It is claimed some professionals believe there may be a correlation between student achievement and the presence of a comprehensive program at their school without having direct evidence of such a relationship.

Additionally, as skeptics of the results produced by comprehensive guidance and counseling programs, Brown and Trusty (2005) object to the belief that comprehensive programs can substantiate a claim of promoting academic success. It is their belief that strategic interventions are far more effective. Strategic interventions are implemented through identification of a specific need, then an intervention based on empirical evidence is selected and the intervention is provided to identified students. This is significantly different from a comprehensive program in which developmentally appropriate interventions are selected and presented to all students with a preventative focus. Brown and Trusty purpose that the method of strategic intervention will promote academic success far more than a comprehensive program in which needs assessments are conducted program wide and all students are systematically provided with prevention or intervention techniques.

Brown and Trusty (2005) point to the faults of the research designs used to support claims that comprehensive counseling programs affect student achievement. The authors argue psychometric properties and research design yet continue to leave a supportive impression for comprehensive guidance programs if not for the research supporting their effectiveness. It appears that the specific interventions that are mentioned could be used to meet standards in ASCA's national model for comprehensive guidance programs, if they were administered systematically or if they were integrated into the individual planning component area, and in fact Brown and Trusty state that having one perspective of the situation would be short-sighted. They envision strategic interventions and comprehensive programs as fitting together in one counseling program, yet they

continue to say that the research basis for declaring student achievement should rest entirely with strategic interventions at this time.

Cobert, Vernon-Jones and Pransky (2006) also doubt the ability of a fully implemented comprehensive guidance program to increase academic achievement in students. They do, however, acknowledge the need for accountability with regards to the school counseling program. Other researchers argue that accountability cannot stop with the implementation of a comprehensive guidance program that it is not enough in and of itself. Systematic and evidence based guidance curricula must be put into place (Rowley, Stroh & Sink, 2005). Guidance curriculum is one of the four main components to the national model and without empirically supported curriculum, student progress may be compromised. Thus selecting curricula which is empirically supported as affecting student development should be a priority within the guidance curriculum component area, which will also make accountability with regards to program results more easily identifiable.

2.8 Summary

Professional school counselors are responsible for meeting the needs of an ever changing student body (Wittmer, 2000). Due to the often extreme diversity of need in schools and a lack of resources available, many counselors choose to emphasize their consultation roles (Holowiak-Urquhart & Taylor, 2005). Jones Sears and Haag Granello (2002) argue that given the ratio of relatively few counselors to many students, it is not realistic to expect counselors will be able to work with all students face-to-face and that consultation and coordination are the only effective means of making significant

developmental differences for students. The national model identifies consultation and coordination as two of the three main activities performed by elementary school counselors; counseling is the other.

The professional counselor will need to develop many skills to effectively implement a comprehensive guidance program in a culturally appropriate manner. One such skill that is essential in a successful program is communication. Given that counselors come into contact with so many individuals involved with the school, communication skills become exceedingly important. It is suggested that counselors should have most of their day spent in face-to-face contact. Often, this may come into direct conflict with the non-counseling duties assigned to many school counselors (Light, 2005), which is precisely why communication with principals about the school counselor's role within the building becomes so important. Counseling students should be instructed in the importance of communication skills and the importance of having two-way regular communication with principals in their buildings.

ASCA attempts to assist school counselors in developing comprehensive counseling programs through the national model. The model provides student standards that act as guides in assisting the school counseling program in promoting student achievement. The concept of standards, as used in counseling programs, refers to what counselors are doing to ensure student success; what the students should know and should be capable of doing as a result of the counseling program in their school (Dahir, 2001). Further, counselor role and functions within the school setting are divided into three main areas of functioning: counseling, consultation, and coordination.

The comprehensive counseling program itself is comprised of four main parts including a foundation, a delivery system, a management system and a system for accountability. The delivery system is the area in which focus is drawn for the main components of a guidance program: guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. Through these functions delivered in the component areas, three main student competencies are being sought; development in the academic, career, and personal/social areas (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2001). These component areas provide for the specific interventions that counselors can use in working successfully with diverse needs within the school community.

ASCA presents that the comprehensive counseling program allows for the school counselor to work intentionally, with a plan, a purpose, and a purposed evaluation method (Sabella, 2006). It is proposed by some authors that counselors operating without a comprehensive plan may spend 80 percent of their time focusing on only 20 percent of their student body; those who are high-achieving students or those who are at-risk (Hatch & Bowers, 2002). The other 80 percent of the student body are thought to be denied access to the school counselor and the benefits of the counseling program. Holowiak-Urquhart and Taylor (2005) stress the importance of operating with a plan but also remaining flexible enough to meet the needs of a diverse student body. Additionally, the national model thus far has not given guidance for counselors attempting to implement comprehensive counseling programs in less than ideal conditions, such as higher than recommended ratios or in itinerate counselor's programs.

Counselors should become proactive in educating professionals within the school community as well as families and other stake holders as to the roles and responsibilities of the profession in order to promote the successful implementation of a counseling program (Fitch et al., 2001). Auxiliary or administrative support activities should be eliminated from the counselor's daily activities to allow for an effective guidance program (Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1994). While comprehensive counseling programs are meant to deliver proactive and developmentally appropriate interventions to all students, they should at the same time be tailored to the specific needs of the school community.

In this era of accountability, counselors must demonstrate effectiveness with the programs they implement. ASCA presents the comprehensive counseling program as the best practice for counselors in developing their programs without addressing specific challenges that counselors may face in the reality of implementing programs. Critics of the comprehensive counseling program present that strategic interventions are the only way to measure program effectiveness. At present, there appears to be enough conflicting beliefs presented that there may not be a consistent implementation of comprehensive counseling programs.

Chapter 3

Methodology for the Research

3.1 Introduction

Elementary school counseling in Alaska is faced with all the same challenges as programs across the country (e.g., securing support for the program or lack of funds) in addition to more specific challenges such as higher than recommended student to counselor ratios as well as the common practice of itinerate counseling. Thus far, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has not offered a guide to counselors in how to adapt comprehensive counseling programs to work in less than optimal conditions. It was the intent of this research to gather the current practices of elementary school counselors in Alaska, critically analyze those data, and compare findings with what is provided by ASCA as a model for developing programs so that informed recommendations can be made to guide the future of the elementary school counseling profession.

The first step in determining how current practices match with recommended practices was to assess what Alaska professional school counselors are presently doing in their elementary counseling programs. In order to conduct this examination, the Counselor Activities Survey, which was developed by this researcher through the use of state and national standards as well as the professional literature, was sent to all elementary school counselors currently employed in Alaska. The implementation of this survey was through a three-step process which included sending a pre-contact letter, then the survey, and finally a second chance survey. All mailings were personalized and every

survey contained a stamped return envelope. Efforts were made to maximize response rates and minimize errors in this research.

3.2 Survey Design and Implementation

A survey aimed at collecting information about guidance programs in Alaska was developed based upon state, national and professional standards of practice (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2001; American School Counselor Association, 2003), as well as the professional literature (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Dahir, 2001; Gysbers, 2001a; Holcomb-McCoy, Bryan & Rahill, 2002; Johnson & Whitfield, 1991). The survey instrument contains four main sections (see Appendix B, pg. 145). The first section collected demographic information from the respondents. Specific items asked in this section include those related to experience, training, and work load.

The second section within the survey instrument included specific program questions. These types of questions were used to establish to what extent a comprehensive guidance program had been put into place, which in turn is indicative of appropriate job duties (Sink & Stroh, 2003). This section also addressed the counselor's stated satisfaction levels and future employment plans. The third section dealt with time spent on duties. This section identified the frequency ratings with which counselors perform tasks identified as both appropriate and inappropriate by professional organizations as well as how often they would prefer to perform these tasks.

The forth and final section addressed professional questions. Areas related to supervision and mentoring that the counselor receives or contributes were explored as

well as professional development activities engaged in by the professional counselor. All of these sections, while independent in their focus, were tied together in how they correlate to determine implications for professional retention, program effectiveness and the resulting student benefits as outlined by ASCA's proposed national model for comprehensive counseling programs.

When working with survey mail research, there are four common types of errors that occur and were addressed in this study: sampling, non-coverage, non-response, and measurement errors (Dillman, 1991). Each of these types of errors occurs when pieces of the data are missing. Whether this occurrence is due to non-collection or miscollection, the data cannot reflect actual information if the population was not accurately surveyed (Groves, 1987). In developing this survey, obtaining both maximum return and minimum error were considered.

Sampling errors occur when the means that are used to gather the sample exclude some members of the population (Dillman, 1991). Similar to sampling error, non-coverage error has to do with how participants are selected. However, where sampling error involves the randomized assignment, or lack thereof, of participants to a particular group within the study, non-coverage error which threatens validity relates to the loss of chance for a person or group of people to be selected to participate in the study at all (Groves, 1987). This type of error was controlled for in this study by including all elementary school counselors within the state of Alaska as potential participants.

Looking further at common errors in survey research, the area of non-response error has been vastly studied in the professional literature in order to reduce this

complication and increase responses. The majority of research has been focused on increasing response rates; far less research has been done on why potential respondents may chose not to participate (Dillman, 1991). In designing an effective survey instrument, the literature points to several things that can be done to increase response rate and lessen the chances of non-response error. Variables identified as important in increasing response rates include a pre-contact with potential respondents to inform them of the survey, saliency of topic within the cover letter, follow-up contacts with potential respondents, guarantees of anonymity, personalizing the contacts, university sponsorship, and the use of hand stamped return envelopes (Dillman; Harvey, 1987; Linsky, 1975).

All of the above variables were employed within this research survey. A three-step approach was utilized. Initially a pre-contact letter that identified this research study and the requested contribution from potential participants (see Appendix C, pg. 147) was mailed to all elementary school counselors in Alaska. This was followed by the survey instrument and accompanying introduction letter which addressed the relevance of this research to the work that the school counselor was currently doing (see Appendix D, pg. 148). A final follow-up mailing and thank you was sent to potential participants who may not have responded to the initial survey, to allow for a second chance to become part of this research (see Appendix E, pg. 149) and thus reduce non-response. Each mailing was hand-stamped, as was each of the self-addressed return envelopes. Each contact letter was hand-signed in blue ink to be a visual element of personalization. The introduction letters as well as the survey itself referred to this research as being part of doctoral research at the University of Alaska Fairbanks to demonstrate legitimacy and increase response rates.

Additionally, this survey was formed in booklet style (Dillman, 1991) to increase response rate. On the initial page, demographic information was requested from the respondent. The interior pages of the booklet asked respondents program questions aimed at discerning the level of implementation of a comprehensive program within the participant's school (Sink & Stroh, 2003) as well as one open-ended question regarding what the respondent perceives as other resources needed to meet the needs of their school population. The back page of the booklet survey contained specific role and duty questions (Maliszewski & Mackiel, 2002) in order to further evaluate current practices of elementary school counselors. Each of the three areas of counselor duties (i.e., consultation, collaboration and counseling) were considered as well as the student competencies in the areas of academic, personal/social and career standards, for development of this survey.

Finally, measurement error results as a discrepancy between real and self-reported data. This can occur because respondents are unable to report accurate information, are unclear about the question, or the order in which questions are asked influences the respondents answers (Dillman, 1991). Israel and Taylor (1990) found that wording within the survey may influence response. For example, factual questions received higher response rates than did evaluative questions. While this survey was designed with a much larger factual collection of information than evaluative, there is a section in which respondents were asked to rate what their preferences would be for specific counselor activities. Additionally, the survey was reviewed by two counselor educators for clarity

and content. Item revisions were then made based on feedback in an attempt to reduce the effects of error on this survey research.

3.3 Participants

Potential participants for this research included all elementary school counselors in the state of Alaska. One of the challenges of working in Alaska is that many counselors cover kindergarten through eighth grade or even sometimes kindergarten through the twelfth grade. Counselors were asked to answer this survey only for their work with kindergarten through sixth grade to maintain a clear description of what is meant by elementary school counseling.

The process of locating every elementary school counselor in Alaska began with a search of the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development's (ADEED) website. The website is a state-run site that provides information and links related to education in Alaska. The search function provided a list of 413 potential schools. This number was reduced by eliminating the schools which were listed as middle schools or correspondence schools. It was enhanced by including school districts that employed itinerate counselors who travel to several schools, while at the same time reducing double contact by only sending surveys to the main location when a counselor served multiple schools.

The resulting list of schools was first searched on the World Wide Web to attain telephone numbers for each. A total of 366 individual schools and four district offices which employed itinerate counselors were contacted by telephone to establish if a school counselor worked within that building and what the counselor's name was so that

correspondence could be personally addressed. This search provided 133 potential participants; the other schools reported having no counselor at the school or sharing a counselor with multiple sites in which case the main school was the only site counted. After an initial mailing to each participant was sent to introduce the research and to notify the potential participant that a survey instrument would follow within a week, two participants responded via email that one was no longer working in the capacity of school counselor within her building and the other was working as a school psychologist at present. This allowed for 131 potential participants, including five schools that were unreachable by internet or telephone to confirm whether their school employed a school counselor and to which a general letter addressed to the school counselor was sent.

The survey was then sent. An additional email response was received from a participant indicating that she was now working as a school psychologist. One survey came back completed but indicated that it was done by a psychologist rather than the school counselor, and indicated that the position of school counselor did not exist at that school; this survey was eliminated from the findings. Two surveys were returned completed by social workers within the school and were also eliminated from the findings. Another email was received indicating that the counselor at that school was in truth a teacher on special assignment and that potential participant would not be returning the survey. One survey was returned to sender as undeliverable. Additionally, even with attempts to not send double surveys to those counselors employed in more than one school, one survey was returned marked with a statement that the counselor had already filled one out at another school. These eliminations left 124 potential participants for this

research. A total of 85 completed surveys were returned, resulting in a 69 percent return rate.

Among the participants in this study 86 percent were Caucasian. Six percent of respondents marked Other as their ethnicity. Three and a half percent, or three respondents, indicated Alaska Native or Native American as their ethnicity. Two and a half percent indicated African American and one percent indicated Hispanic. One respondent did not indicate any ethnicity (see Figure 1).

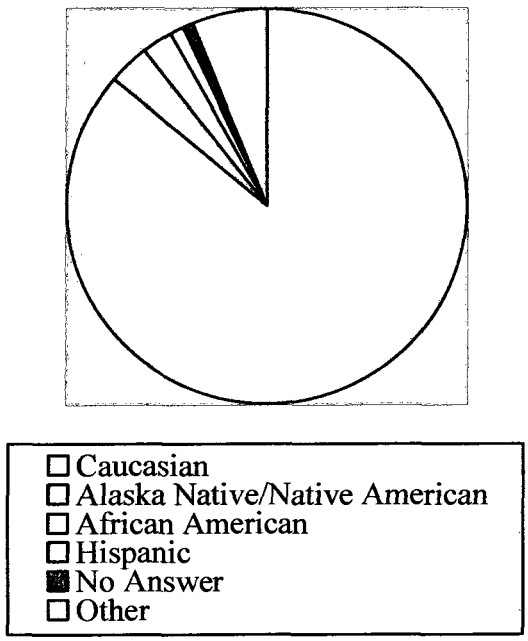

Figure 1 Respondent Ethnicity

In this study, 66 percent of respondents were female and 34 percent male. The predominate age groups represented in this survey were those between 41 and 50-years-old (28 percent of the respondents), and those between 51 and 60-years-old (29 percent of respondents). Every age range available on this survey was represented. Twelve percent

of the respondents were in the 20 to 30-years-old bracket, 18 percent in the 31 to 40 age range,12 percent in the 61 to 70 age range, and one percent in the over 70-years-old bracket (see Figure 2).

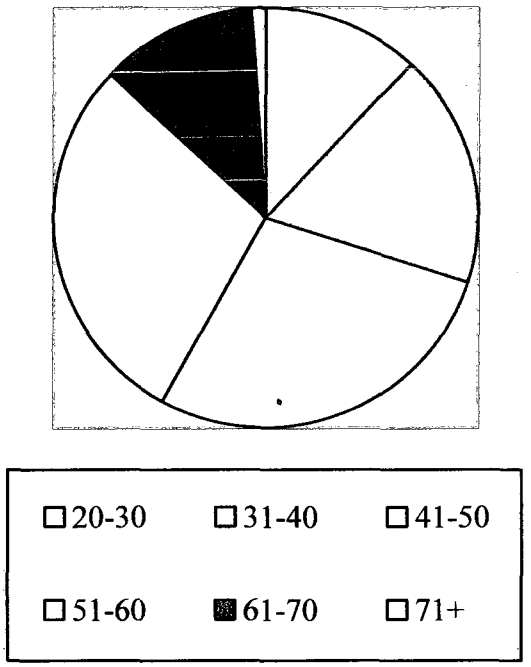

Figure 2 Respondent Age Range

The participants in this study also indicated a wide range of experience levels. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents had worked as a school counselor for less than five years. Thirty percent indicated that they had worked more than five years but less than ten years, 14 percent between 11 and 15 years, and 16 percent indicated that they had been employed as professional school counselors for 16 or more years (see Figure 3). However, 68 percent of the participants in this study also indicated that they had been in their current position as a school counselor for less than five years.

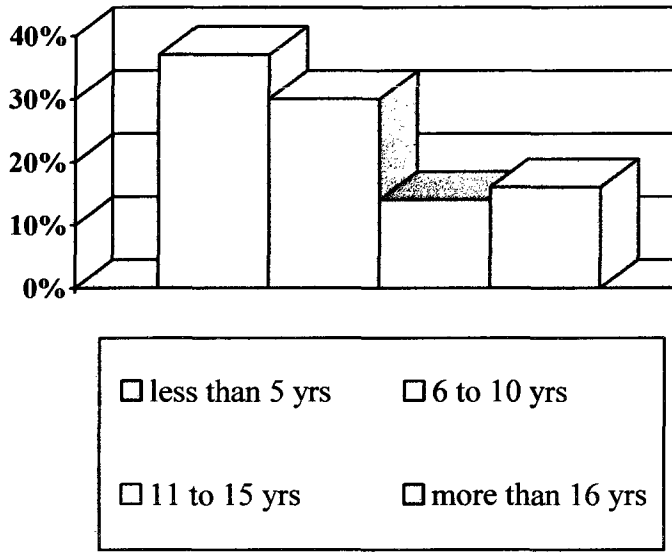

Figure 3 Respondent Experience Level

Sixty-eight percent of counselors in this study were employed in only one school; however, respondents reported working in up to seven schools. There were 27 percent of counselors who reported having counselor-to-student ratios that were less than 1:250. Ratios of one counselor for 250 to 350 students were reported at 26 percent. Twenty-nine percent of counselors indicated that their counselor to student ratios were 1:350-450. There were 18 percent of respondents that indicated their ratios were one counselor to more than 450 students (see Figure 4). One respondent wrote in separately on the side of the survey that s/he was the only counselor serving 900 students.

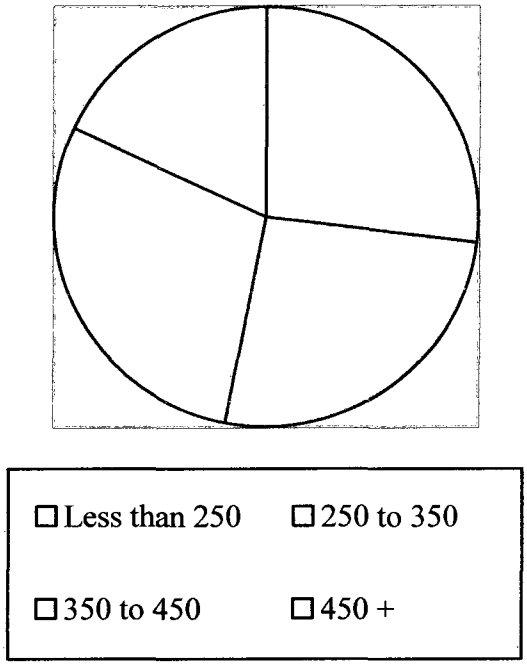

Figure 4 Student to Counselor Ratios

Approximately half of the respondents in this survey, 47 percent, were previously teachers before becoming school counselors. Seven percent were not teachers but had undergraduate degrees in education. The rest of the respondents, 46 percent, were in another field before becoming school counselors. There were 66 percent of the respondents that reported they intended to continue as school counselors, one percent intended to quit, 13 percent planed to retire and 19 percent were undecided about their intentions at the time of this survey.

3.4 Summary

The Counselor Activities Survey was developed based on national and state standards, as well as the professional literature. The survey was then sent to all

elementary counselors in the state of Alaska. Through this survey, data were collected regarding the current practices of elementary school counselors in Alaska.

Elementary school counseling was defined as those programs providing interventions/prevention for kindergarten through sixth grade. Counselors were directed to limit their responses to the scope of elementary counseling programs. There was a 69 percent return rate with this survey. The basic demographics of the majority of respondents align with representations in survey research across the nation. The respondents were predominately white females between the ages of 41 and 60-years-old. Over half of the respondents had been employed in their current position for less than five years, and 73 percent reported higher than recommended student-to-counselor ratios when compared with the national model.

Chapter 4

Results of the Research

4.1 Introduction

Findings from the survey were organized into several sections. The first section describes elements of the counseling program through both professional and program questions. Many of these elements can be used to determine how fully a comprehensive program has been implemented. Next, each of the main component areas of the delivery system was represented in the data collection. Finally, suggestions for improving their respective programs were given by respondents. Organized in this way, the results show what kind of program participants operate, what tasks counselors are completing and how they see best to improve counseling services at the elementary level in the state of Alaska.

4.2 Elements of Counseling Programs

Professional school counselors in this study indicated that 38 percent have a written plan in place for their counseling program, 36 percent do not have a written plan and 25 percent had schools or districts that were in the process of writing a plan for the counseling program. In the area of a written job description for the counselor, 21 percent reported a clearly written job description. A larger portion of respondents, at 45 percent, indicated that their job descriptions were somewhat clear. Twelve percent reported that the job description was written but not clear, while 13 percent indicated that a written job description did not exist at their school.

More than half of the respondents, at 61 percent, indicated that they use specific guidance curriculum within their counseling programs. Similarly, 66 percent stated a familiarity with a comprehensive counseling model. Seventy-eight percent of participants reported that in their program they meet with other staff/faculty frequently. The reports for supervision or consultation was not as grouped, however, with 21 percent stating weekly supervision or consultation, 33 percent indicated monthly, 13 percent quarterly, 19 percent yearly and 11 percent reported never having supervision or consultation meetings. It is not surprising then, that 64 percent of school counselors report that they have not mentored a new counselor to the field.

A little less than half of the participants in this study, at 41 percent, have supervised an intern within the last few years. Thirty-four percent of respondents indicated that they would only need some additional training to properly supervise an intern. The respondents varied on this item with 12 percent feeling they would need much more training, 20 percent needing only a little training and 31 percent felt that they would need very little additional training to supervise an intern.

The majority of participants, 59 percent, felt that they were very supported by their administration. Forty percent felt that they had very effective programs, 49 percent somewhat effective, eight percent reported limited effectiveness with their counseling program and one percent reported a non-effective program. To remain effective, counselors must conduct needs assessments. The participants in this study reported that 67 percent had conducted a needs assessment at some time, 17 percent often conducted these assessments and 14 percent had never conducted needs assessments. Similarly, 57

percent of respondents had at some point conducted evaluations on whether needs were being met, while 14 percent often did this task and 26 percent had never conducted these evaluations.

4.3 Components of Counseling Programs

There are four main components of the delivery system: guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. There are other duties outside of these main delivery areas as well. These are traditionally non-counseling activities, and are grouped under a heading of Other Duties for this survey.

In the components section of the survey, respondents were asked to rank the listed activities to identify the frequency that they actually performed the tasks and also the frequency that they would prefer to do these tasks. Participants were given a scale from one to five for ranking purposes, with one indicating that the participant never does this task and five indicating that the participant frequently does this task. The rankings were delineated from each other based on never meaning that the respondent never did this task, rarely indicating that the respondent did this task about one or two days a week, occasionally indicating about two or three days a week, routinely indicates about three to four days a week and frequently indicates that the respondents does this task about four or five days a week. There is some overlap in amount of days when deciding frequency. The rankings and guides were all intended to be average frequencies; no time and task analysis was provided, and no actual tracking was expected. These reportings are an estimation of the frequency with which counselors perform certain tasks within the component areas.

4.3.1 Guidance Curriculum

There were three activities identified as part of the guidance curriculum component area that were examined in this survey instrument: time spent coordinating with teachers on guidance lessons, time spent developing guidance lessons, and time spent on classroom guidance. On average there were five missing entries from the category of actually performing the tasks. There were 18 missing data entries on average from the category of preferring to perform the task.

On the counseling activity of time spent coordinating with teachers on guidance lessons there were variances across most of the frequencies. There was a 14 and 11 percent, respectively, higher reporting in the rarely and occasionally do this task frequencies for actually coordinating with teachers versus the reporting in the prefer to do this task category (see Table 1 and Table 2). There was a 15 and eight percent higher reporting in the prefer to do this task category over the counselors who report that they actually do this task routinely and frequently, which was nearly double in reporting.

Table 1 Actual Time Coordinating with Teacher on Guidance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	4	4.7	5.0
	I rarely do this task	31	36.5	38.8
	I occasionally do this task	27	31.8	33.8
	I routinely do this task	12	14.1	15.0
	I frequently do this task	6	7.1	7.5
Missing		5	5.9	
	Total	85		

Table 2 Preferred Time Coordinating with Teacher on Guidance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	3	3.5	4.5
	I rarely do this task	16	18.8	24.2
	I occasionally do this task	15	17.6	22.7
	I routinely do this task	22	25.9	33.3
	I frequently do this task	10	11.8	15.2
Missing		19	22.4	
	Total	85		

For the counseling activity of time spent on developing guidance lessons, there were slight differences in valid percentages across all frequencies. There were no percentage differences that were higher than five percent. Additionally, there was no identifiable pattern (see Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3 Actual Time on Developing Lessons

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	9	10.6	11.4
	I rarely do this task	24	28.2	30.4
	I occasionally do this task	9	10.6	11.4
	I routinely do this task	18	21.2	22.8
	I frequently do this task	19	22.4	24.1
Missing		6	7.1	
	Total	85		

Table 4 Preferred Time on Developing Lessons

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	5	5.9	7.5
	I rarely do this task	21	24.7	31.3
	I occasionally do this task	11	12.9	16.4
	I routinely do this task	17	20.0	25.4
	I frequently do this task	13	15.3	19.4
Missing		18	21.2	
	Total	85		

Tables five and six demonstrate that time spent on classroom guidance was similar in reporting to the activity of developing guidance lessons in that there were slight variances across the majority of frequencies. However, there was also a large variance in two frequencies that should be noted. In the frequency of occasionally doing this task, the percentage of counselors who identified that they would prefer to occasionally do this task was nearly three times higher than those that indicated that they actually occasionally spend time on classroom guidance. Additionally, seven percent more counselors indicated that they actually frequently spend time on this activity than those who indicated that they would prefer to frequently spend time on classroom guidance lessons.

Table 5 Actual Time on Classroom Guidance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	4	4.7	4.9
	I rarely do this task	11	12.9	13.6
	I occasionally do this task	7	8.2	8.6
	I routinely do this task	22	25.9	27.2
	I frequently do this task	37	43.5	45.7
Missing		4	4.7	
	Total	85		

Table 6 Preferred Time on Classroom Guidance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	1	1.2	1.5
	I rarely do this task	6	7.1	9.0
	I occasionally do this task	16	18.8	23.9
	I routinely do this task	18	21.2	26.9
	I frequently do this task	26	30.6	38.8
Missing		18	21.2	
	Total	85		

4.3.2 Individual Planning

There were four activities within the individual planning component area that were included in this survey instrument: individual student assessment, academic advising, individual student planning, and career counseling. The average missing entries for the individual planning component in the category of actually performing these activities was seven entries. The amount of average missing data in the prefer to perform these activities category were 22 entries. In three out of four of the activities examined in this component area it was found that counselors preferred to spend more time than they were actually able to on the specific counseling activities.

Looking at the valid percent for individual student assessment activities, approximately nine percent more respondents indicated that they never or rarely spend time on student assessment over those that indicated that they would prefer to never or rarely spend time on this activity (see Table 7). In the categories of occasionally, routinely or frequently engaging in individual student assessment, between five to seven percent more respondents indicated they would prefer to do this task over those indicating they actually do this task with these frequencies (see Table 8).

Table 7 Actual Time on Individual Assessment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	21	24.7	26.3
	I rarely do this task	40	47.1	50.0
	I occasionally do this task	13	15.3	16.3
	I routinely do this task	4	4.7	5.0
	I frequently do this task	2	2.4	2.5
Missing		5	5.9	
	Total	85		

Table 8 Preferred Time on Individual Assessment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	10	11.8	15.9
	I rarely do this task	26	30.6	41.3
	I occasionally do this task	15	17.6	23.8
	I routinely do this task	7	8.2	11.1
	I frequently do this task	5	5.9	7.9
Missing		22	25.9	
	Total	85		

In the counseling activity area of academic advising, there were small variations in percentage reporting for the categories of preferred versus actual (see Table 9 and Table 10). In the frequencies of never doing this task or rarely doing this task, the percentage of respondents indicating that they actually do academic advising never or rarely was higher than the percentage of counselors indicating that they would prefer to never or rarely do this. Additionally, the percentage of counselors reporting that they would prefer to do academic advising is higher slightly in the frequencies of routinely or frequently doing this task. For the frequency category of occasionally completing this task the valid percent is nearly the same; to a tenth of a percent.

Table 9 Actual Time on Academic Advising

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	21	24.7	26.9
	I rarely do this task	23	27.1	29.5
	I occasionally do this task	19	22.4	24.4
	I routinely do this task	9	10.6	11.5
	I frequently do this task	6	7.1	7.7
Missing		7	8.2	
	Total	85		

Table 10 Preferred Time on Academic Advising

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	15	17.6	23.1
	I rarely do this task	15	17.6	23.1
	I occasionally do this task	16	18.8	24.6
	I routinely do this task	10	11.8	15.4
	I frequently do this task	9	10.6	13.8
Missing		20	23.5	
	Total	85		

The percentage of counselors indicating they actually only rarely do individual student planning is almost double that of those reporting that they would prefer to rarely do this task (see Table 11 and Table 12). Similarly, those indicating that they would prefer to routinely do this task over those that actually routinely are able to conduct individual student planning activities was a ten percent increase of indication.

Table 11 Actual Time on Individual Planning

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	15	17.6	19.2
	I rarely do this task	27	31.8	34.6
	I occasionally do this task	13	15.3	16.7
	I routinely do this task	13	15.3	16.7
	I frequently do this task	10	11.8	12.8
Missing		7	8.2	
	Total	85		

Table 12 Preferred Time on Individual Planning

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	9	10.6	15.0
	I rarely do this task	10	11.8	16.7
	I occasionally do this task	14	16.5	23.3
	I routinely do this task	16	18.8	26.7
	I frequently do this task	11	12.9	18.3
Missing		25	29.4	
	Total	85		

In looking at valid percentages for never engaging in career counseling or rarely doing this, Table 13 and Table 14 show that there are higher percentages for actually doing it than preferring to never or rarely do career counseling with students. Respondents indicated that approximately 16 percent more actually rarely do this than prefer to rarely engage in career counseling. While at the same time, respondents indicated greater percentages for preferring to do this task. Twelve percent more respondents reported that they would prefer to frequently engage in career counseling over those that reported they actually frequently do this task.

Table 13 Actual Time on Career Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	15	17.6	19.2
	I rarely do this task	29	34.1	37.2
	I occasionally do this task	21	24.7	26.9
	I routinely do this task	8	9.4	10.3
	I frequently do this task	5	5.9	6.4
Missing		7	8.2	
	Total	85		

Table 14 Preferred Time on Career Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	8	9.4	12.1
	I rarely do this task	14	16.5	21.2
	I occasionally do this task	21	24.7	31.8
	I routinely do this task	11	12.9	16.7
	I frequently do this task	12	14.1	18.2
Missing		19	22.4	
	Total	85		

4.3.3 Responsive Services

Four areas of counseling activities were examined for the responsive services component. Three out of four of the activities in this category were identified by

counselors as preferring to perform with more frequency, while one activity was shown to be preferred by counselors to perform with less frequency. The average missing data for the category of actually performing the counseling activities were four, while the average for the preferred category was 19 missing entries.

Table 15 and Table 16 demonstrate the small percent of variance between frequencies for the counseling activity of individual counseling. Eleven percent more respondents indicated only occasionally completing this task versus preferring to only occasionally conduct individual counseling. Similarly, nine percent more participants indicated a preference for frequently engaging in individual counseling versus actually doing this counseling activity.

Table 15 Actual Time on Individual Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	0	0	0
	I rarely do this task	4	4.7	4.9
	I occasionally do this task	15	17.6	18.3
	I routinely do this task	25	29.4	30.5
	I frequently do this task	38	44.7	46.3
Missing		3	3.5	
	Total	85		

Table 16 Preferred Time on Individual Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	0	0	0
	I rarely do this task	1	1.2	1.4
	I occasionally do this task	5	5.9	7.1
	I routinely do this task	24	28.2	34.3
	I frequently do this task	40	47.1	57.1
Missing		15	17.6	
	Total	85		

In the area of substance abuse counseling, there were slight variances across frequencies (see Table 17 and Table 18). In the frequency of rarely doing this task, there was a report of 13 percent more actually rarely doing this as compared with those indicating that they would prefer to rarely engage in substance abuse counseling. Seven percent more respondents indicating that they would prefer to conduct substance abuse counseling over those reporting that they actually are doing this task.

Table 17 Actual Time on Substance Abuse Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	21	24.7	26.3
	I rarely do this task	40	47.1	50.0
	I occasionally do this task	11	12.9	13.8
	I routinely do this task	5	5.9	6.3
	I frequently do this task	3	3.5	3.8
Missing		5	5.9	
	Total	85		

Table 18 Preferred Time on Substance Abuse Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	20	23.5	32.3
	I rarely do this task	23	27.1	37.1
	I occasionally do this task	9	10.6	14.5
	I routinely do this task	4	4.7	6.5
	I frequently do this task	6	7.1	9.7
Missing		23	27.1	
	Total	85		

Crisis counseling shown in Table 19 and Table 20 demonstrated an area of counseling activity that was different than many of the others. In this area there are slight variations, at three percent, in the rarely, occasionally, and frequently activity frequencies. Eleven percent more respondents prefer to never conduct this activity over those reporting that they actually never perform crisis counseling, while nine percent

more respondents indicated that they actually perform this activity routinely over the percentage of respondents preferring to conduct crisis counseling routinely. However, the majority of respondents indicated that they conducted this activity rarely or occasionally across both actual and preferred findings, with a combined percentage in these two frequencies of 69 percent of respondents indicating that they actually do this activity rarely or occasionally and 68 percent preferring to only do so rarely or occasionally.

Table 19 Actual Time on Crisis Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	1	1.2	1.3
	I rarely do this task	31	36.5	38.8
	I occasionally do this task	24	28.2	30.0
	I routinely do this task	12	14.1	15.0
	I frequently do this task	12	14.1	15.0
Missing		5	5.9	
	Total	85		

Table 20 Preferred Time on Crisis Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	8	9.4	12.7
	I rarely do this task	26	30.6	41.3
	I occasionally do this task	17	20.0	27.0
	I routinely do this task	4	4.7	6.3
	I frequently do this task	8	9.4	12.7
Missing		22	25.9	
	Total	85		

Small group counseling is one of the counselor activities in the responsive services component area. In this area of counselor activity, 20 percent more participants indicated that they rarely do this activity over those that would prefer to rarely do this activity; a near three times as many (see Table 21 and Table 22). Additionally, 20 percent more respondents indicated that they would prefer to routinely conduct small group

counseling over those that actually do routinely conduct this activity, almost two times as many respondents.

Table 21 Actual Time on Small Group Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	4	4.7	4.9
	I rarely do this task	26	30.6	31.7
	I occasionally do this task	26	30.6	31.7
	I routinely do this task	13	15.3	15.9
	I frequently do this task	13	15.3	15.9
Missing		3	3.5	
	Total	85		

Table 22 Preferred Time on Small Group Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	0	0	0
	I rarely do this task	8	9.4	11.3
	I occasionally do this task	26	30.6	36.6
	I routinely do this task	25	29.4	35.2
	I frequently do this task	12	14.1	16.9
Missing		14	16.5	
	Total	85		

4.3.4 System Support

The system support component area is made up of a multitude of tasks including the main counselor activities of coordinating and consulting. This is also the component area where counselor activities such as professional development, research, and literary contributions would be contained. Precisely because there are such a variety of tasks in this component area, there were seven questions related to the system support component in this survey. Five out of seven of the questions received overall indications that counselors would prefer to spend more time on these activities, while two of the counseling activities received indications that counselors are doing the activities with the

same frequency that they would prefer to do these tasks. There were on average five missing data when considering what counselors reported as actually performing in this component area. On average for the category of what counselors prefer to do, there were 18 missing entries.

For the counseling activity of coordinating, this survey looked at the specific tasks of coordinating Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 meetings and coordinating special events. When looking at coordinating IEP/504 meetings, there were slight variances in percentages indicated for each frequency. However, there were no variances more than four percent (see Table 23 and Table 24).

Table 23 Actual Time on Coordinating IEP/504

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	29	34.1	36.3
	I rarely do this task	34	40.0	42.5
	I occasionally do this task	12	14.1	15.0
	I routinely do this task	3	3.5	3.8
	I frequently do this task	2	2.4	2.5
Missing		5	5.9	
	Total	85		

Table 24 Preferred Time on Coordinating IEP/504

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	27	31.8	40.3
	I rarely do this task	26	30.6	38.8
	I occasionally do this task	8	9.4	11.9
	I routinely do this task	2	2.4	3.0
	I frequently do this task	4	4.7	6.0
Missing		18	21.2	
	Total	85		

In the coordinating activity of coordinating special events, there were slight percentage variations across frequencies with the frequency rating of rarely doing this

task as having the most variance. Table 25 and Table 26 show that twelve percent more respondents indicated that they actually only rarely perform this task versus preferring to rarely do this. These reportings demonstrate that counselors are actually performing this task more rarely than they would prefer.

Table 25 Actual Time on Coordinating Special Events

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	15	17.6	18.8
	I rarely do this task	38	44.7	47.5
	I occasionally do this task	20	23.5	25.0
	I routinely do this task	5	5.9	6.3
	I frequently do this task	2	2.4	2.5
Missing		5	5.9	
	Total	85		

Table 26 Preferred Time on Coordinating Special Events

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	15	17.6	23.1
	I rarely do this task	23	27.1	35.4
	I occasionally do this task	19	22.4	29.2
	I routinely do this task	6	7.1	9.2
	I frequently do this task	2	2.4	3.1
Missing		20	23.5	
	Total	85		

The counselor activity of consulting was addressed in three questions on this survey: consulting with teachers, consulting with parents, and consulting with administration. When looking at consulting with teachers, 10 percent more participants reported that they actually do this occasionally over those that would prefer to consult with teachers only occasionally, as seen in Table 27 and Table 28. There were eight percent more respondents indicating that they would prefer to frequently consult with teachers over those who actually do.

Table 27 Actual Time on Consulting with Teachers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	0	0	0
	I rarely do this task	6	7.1	7.5
	I occasionally do this task	22	25.9	27.5
	I routinely do this task	18	21.2	22.5
	I frequently do this task	34	40.0	42.5
Missing		5	5.9	
	Total	85		

Table 28 Preferred Time on Consulting with Teachers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	0	0	0
	I rarely do this task	2	2.4	2.9
	I occasionally do this task	12	14.1	17.6
	I routinely do this task	17	20.0	25.0
	I frequently do this task	37	43.5	54.4
Missing		17	20.0	
	Total	85		

Counselors perform many consulting tasks in their positions within schools. In addition to consulting with teachers, counselors are also consulting with parents. In this study, there was a large variance on all levels of frequencies with the exception of never, which was not indicated by either preferred or actual. Tables 29 and 30 show a variance of 24 percent more respondents indicated that they actually occasionally do this while 22 percent reported that they would prefer to frequently do this task.

Table 29 Actual Time on Consulting with Parents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	0	0	0
	I rarely do this task	15	17.6	18.5
	I occasionally do this task	44	51.8	54.3
	I routinely do this task	16	18.8	19.8
	I frequently do this task	6	7.1	7.4
Missing		4	4.7	
	Total	85		

Table 30 Preferred Time on Consulting with Parents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	0	0	0
	I rarely do this task	5	5.9	7.2
	I occasionally do this task	21	24.7	30.4
	I routinely do this task	23	27.1	33.3
	I frequently do this task	20	23.5	29.0
Missing		16	18.8	
	Total	85		

When looking at the third question related to consultation, consulting with administration, there were slight variances in percentage across all frequencies, with no clear pattern, shown in Table 31 and Table 32. In the category of actually performing this task, there were not any counselors that indicated that they never consult with administration, yet in the category of preferring to do this task, there was one counselor who indicated that it would be preferred to never consult with administration. Outside of the never frequency, variances were seen between three and six percent on the remaining frequencies from rarely completing this task to frequently consulting with administration.

Table 31 Actual Time on Consulting with Administration

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	0	0	0
	I rarely do this task	9	10.6	11.3
	I occasionally do this task	18	21.2	22.5
	I routinely do this task	19	22.4	23.8
	I frequently do this task	34	40.0	42.5
Missing		5	5.9	
	Total	85		

Table 32 Preferred Time on Consulting with Administration

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	1	1.2	1.5
	I rarely do this task	4	4.7	5.9
	I occasionally do this task	17	20.0	25.0
	I routinely do this task	20	23.5	29.4
	I frequently do this task	26	30.6	38.2
Missing		17	20.0	
	Total	85		

The other area addressed in the system support component area is that of development; both professional development and program development were examined in this study. In the area of professional development, there is a large percentage of variance across frequencies. Counselors indicated in the area of professional development with 30 percent more frequency that they actually rarely do this activity as compared with the preferred frequency (see Table 33 and Table 34). Additionally, participants indicated with between nine to 14 percent more frequency a preferred ability to occasionally, routinely or frequently engage in professional development.

Table 33 Actual Time on Professional Development

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	9	10.6	11.5
	I rarely do this task	47	55.3	60.3
	I occasionally do this task	19	22.4	24.4
	I routinely do this task	2	2.4	2.6
	I frequently do this task	1	1.2	1.3
Missing		7	8.2	
	Total	85		

Table 34 Preferred Time on Professional Development

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	4	4.7	6.2
	I rarely do this task	20	23.5	30.8
	I occasionally do this task	23	27.1	35.4
	I routinely do this task	11	12.9	16.9
	I frequently do this task	7	8.2	10.8
Missing		20	23.5	
	Total	85		

Program development is a task within the system services component area in which counselors do many things such as planning and evaluating results of the counseling program. In this area of counselor activity, there are variances across each frequency indicating that respondents are actually never or rarely doing this activity more than would be preferred. Similarly, participants report a greater preferred frequency for occasionally, routinely or frequently doing this task over reports of actually performing program development activities at these frequencies (see Table 35 and Table 36).

Table 35 Actual Time on Program Development

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	12	14.1	15.2
	I rarely do this task	30	35.3	38.0
	I occasionally do this task	20	23.5	25.3
	I routinely do this task	11	12.9	13.9
	I frequently do this task	6	7.1	7.6
Missing		6	7.1	
	Total	85		

Table 36 Preferred Time on Program Development

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	6	7.1	9.1
	I rarely do this task	15	17.6	22.7
	I occasionally do this task	25	29.4	37.9
	I routinely do this task	11	12.9	16.7
	I frequently do this task	9	10.6	13.6
Missing		19	22.4	
	Total	85		

4.3.5 Other Duties

In addition to the counseling activities that professional school counselors are conducting, there are other duties within the school that counselors are being asked to perform. For this survey, there were four questions within this domain: dealing with student behaviors, administrative duties, coordinating testing and then a more broadly listed other duties. On average, there were eight missing data from the actually performing these tasks category. In the category of preferring to perform, there were on average 20 missing entries from respondents completing this survey. Overall, respondents indicated in all four activities within this component area that counselors would prefer to do these tasks less frequently.

Dealing with student behavior can be a task that counselors perform within their schools. In looking at this area of counselor duties the largest variances occur at the far ends of the frequency ratings. There is a 12 percent greater indication for preferring to never do this task. At the same time, there is a 20 percent greater reporting of actually doing this task frequently over what would be preferred at this frequency by counselors completing this survey (see Table 37 and Table 38).

Table 37 Actual Time on Student Behavior

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	1	1.2	1.2
	I rarely do this task	9	10.6	11.1
	I occasionally do this task	24	28.2	29.6
	I routinely do this task	17	20.0	21.0
	I frequently do this task	30	35.3	37.0
Missing		4	4.7	
	Total	85		

Table 38 Preferred Time on Student Behavior

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	9	10.6	13.2
	I rarely do this task	12	14.1	17.6
	I occasionally do this task	22	25.9	32.4
	I routinely do this task	13	15.3	19.1
	I frequently do this task	12	14.1	17.6
Missing		17	20.0	
	Total	85		

In addition to dealing with student behaviors, counselors are sometimes faced with conducting administrative duties. In this task area, variances were seen across the frequencies as well. When looking at valid percentages, counselors reported 14 percent more preferred to never do this task over those who reported that they actually do this task. While nine to 12 percent more, respectively, reported in the frequencies of routinely or frequently spending time on administrative duties over those who reported preferring to do those tasks routinely or frequently (see Table 39 and Table 40).

Table 39 Actual Time on Administrative Duties

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	18	21.2	22.5
	I rarely do this task	24	28.2	30.0
	I occasionally do this task	13	15.3	16.3
	I routinely do this task	13	15.3	16.3
	I frequently do this task	12	14.1	15.0
Missing		5	5.9	
	Total	85		

Table 40 Preferred Time on Administrative Duties

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	25	29.4	36.8
	I rarely do this task	26	30.6	38.2
	I occasionally do this task	10	11.8	14.7
	I routinely do this task	3	3.5	4.4
	I frequently do this task	4	4.7	5.9
Missing		17	20.0	
	Total	85		

Coordinating testing is sometimes an activity that becomes the school counselor's task. Tables 41 and 42 show slight variations across the rarely, occasionally, routinely and frequently performing or preferring to perform these tasks frequencies, for the task of coordinating testing. However, the frequency of never doing this task showed a larger variance than the others with 18 percent more counselors reporting that they would prefer to never do this task than the number who reported they actually do coordinate testing. At 57 percent, this was a majority of respondents indicating that they would prefer to never coordinate testing.

Table 41 Actual Time on Coordinating Testing

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	29	34.1	39.7
	I rarely do this task	19	22.4	26.0
	I occasionally do this task	12	14.1	16.4
	I routinely do this task	8	9.4	11.0
	I frequently do this task	5	5.9	6.8
Missing		12	14.1	
	Total	85		

Table 42 Preferred Time on Coordinating Testing

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	36	42.4	57.1
	I rarely do this task	14	16.5	22.2
	I occasionally do this task	10	11.8	15.9
	I routinely do this task	3	3.5	4.8
	I frequently do this task	0	0	0
Missing		22	25.9	
	Total	85		

In the broader area of simply other duties, counselors are asked to perform a wide variety of tasks including such things as bus duty, covering classrooms, or detention duty. In this survey, 20 percent more, or almost two times as many respondents indicated preferring never to do this task over the number indicating they actually never conduct other duties. Similarly, 10 to 15 percent, respectively, more respondents indicate that they actually routinely or frequently perform other duties over the indicated preference (see Table 43 and Table 44).

Table 43 Actual Time on Other Duties

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	20	23.5	26.3
	I rarely do this task	15	17.6	19.7
	I occasionally do this task	14	16.5	18.4
	I routinely do this task	11	12.9	14.5
	I frequently do this task	16	18.8	21.1
Missing		9	10.6	
	Total	85		

Table 44 Preferred Time on Other Duties

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	I never do this task	29	34.1	46.0
	I rarely do this task	16	18.8	25.4
	I occasionally do this task	11	12.9	17.5
	I routinely do this task	3	3.5	4.8
	I frequently do this task	4	4.7	6.3
Missing		22	25.9	
	Total	85		

4.4 Improving the Program

Seventy-seven participants (91 percent) in this study responded to an open ended question regarding what would improve their counseling programs. The answers then were grouped into 12 main categories which encompassed the themes of the comments. The category that was most often referred to was that of smaller counselor-to-student ratios. Thirty participants responded with comments that indicated that the ratio within their schools was a concern that, if reduced, would improve the counseling program. One school counselor responded that s/he was an itinerant counselor and thus only visited sites one or two days a month on average. There were similar statements made from many of the participants in this study. One respondent wrote on the side of the survey that the counselor-to-student ratio in his/her position was 1:900.

Other suggestions for changes that could produce improvement in elementary school counseling programs in Alaska were noted as: more or better facilities/space, increasing parent involvement, eliminating non-counseling duties, expanding the curriculum or resources available to the counselor, employing a counseling coordinator, developing a peer mentoring program, having less turn-over, increasing the school counseling budget, providing more training for school staff and faculty, conducting more coordination with other school professionals, increased support of the counseling program, implementing a specific plan/model, increased mental health services in Alaska, having a clearly defined role, and working with a more team approach to the school counseling program (see Appendix G, pg. 151).

4.5 Summary

These data represent specific elements of counseling programs, frequencies of performance on tasks within each of the component areas, as well as suggestions for how elementary counseling programs can be improved at the local and district levels. Valid percents were used for reporting due to large variances between missing data in the component areas. Additionally, results were presented through the use of descriptive statistics. The results were organized in distinct sections not only for ease of reading but also to allow for comparisons with the national model for comprehensive counseling programs.

Chapter 5

Discussion of Elementary School Counseling in Alaska

5.1 Introduction

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) presents a national model which serves as an outline for developing comprehensive counseling programs. Elementary counselors in Alaska face all the typical challenges in implementing a comprehensive program, as well as specific challenges such as isolated locations, strong multicultural influences, and the practice of employing itinerate counselors to serve many schools. The present study surveyed elements of counseling programs in Alaska elementary schools to determine to what extent the national model is in use.

Additionally, a comparison was made between the recommended duties of school counselors and the actual duties of school counselors in Alaska. Common barriers to counseling program success are identified and addressed in the discussion section as they relate to Alaska elementary counseling programs, with recommendations for adaptations to promote successful implementation of the state recommended program. Limitations to this study include the instrument used and the type of data collected.

5.2 Discussion

It has been suggested that counselors must acknowledge the pressure for accountability within the school system and begin to demonstrate how programs are promoting student achievement (Studer, 2006). One question that counselors may have about accountability is how exactly to measure the effectiveness of a school counseling program. ASCA provides a guide in the form of the comprehensive counseling program,

which speaks to the need for demonstrating effectiveness. However, counselors are still left somewhat in the dark on exactly what this means. Gysbers (2001a) expands on the model to specifically state how this guide can be used for evaluation purposes when fully implemented, through a three part evaluation including a written program, a written job description and an evaluation of the component areas of the comprehensive counseling program.

There were 44 percent of counselors in this study who indicated that they were not familiar with a comprehensive model. It was not asked whether the counselors were using a model, just whether they were familiar with a model. This is a surprising amount of counselors currently unfamiliar with this type of program, considering that the use of a comprehensive counseling model is recommended for use in all elementary schools in this state by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (ADEED) as well as nationally by ASCA (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2001; American School Counselor Association, 2003).

The first part of evaluation is that of a written counseling program. When looking at counseling programs in Alaska, 36 percent of respondents said that they did not have a clearly written program. Having a written counseling program with a stated mission and goals is a necessary first step in evaluation. That is so a clear determination of what the program aims to complete is outlined.

Second, a detailed job description or role assignment is needed for the counseling program. In this research with Alaska elementary school counselors, it was found that 45 percent of respondents stated that they had a somewhat clear written job description,

while 12 percent indicated having an unclear description and 13 percent reported having no written job description. Again, without a clear definition of what the school counselor is supposed to be doing in the school, effectiveness is hard to measure.

If a counseling program is to be evaluated in pieces, which are then summed to attest to effectiveness, then the pieces that should be examine are whether the program has a written statement of its mission and goals, whether there is a detailed job description or role assignment for the counselor, and how the individual component areas are being addressed effectively. Just under half of the counselors surveyed in Alaska elementary schools do not have an adequately written program and a written job description. Additionally, 33 percent of these counselors also report that they do not regularly conduct needs assessments and evaluate to see if needs are being met by interventions, while more specifically 14 percent had never conducted a needs assessment.

The final step in evaluation, as outlined in the ASCA's national model for comprehensive counseling programs and further elaborated on by Gysbers (2001a), is to measure the impact of the four main component areas of the counseling program. Suggested ways to evaluate these components include the use of time and task analysis or pre- and post-test measures. These methods tend to assess on a small scale what is being evaluated at a program-wide level. That is to say, while the idea of accountability applies to the counseling program as a whole, each of its components must be evaluated individually. For example, one of the foci of the counseling program may be to prevent bullying. To measure effectiveness in this area, the counselor may first explore how

many detention referrals or written reprimands were given to students because of bullying prior to the intervention. Then, after instituting a bully prevention curricula school-wide, the counselor would again explore how many reprimands were given for bullying over a period of time to see if the program had an impact. This type of evaluation, however, only indicates whether or not the particular intervention was effective, it cannot be generalized to say that the entire counseling program is effective. Validating program effectiveness is where counselors have difficulties with the comprehensive counseling program model and accountability.

The first of the four main component areas addressed in this study was that of guidance curriculum. Thirty-nine percent of the counselors responding to this survey indicated that they do not use specific guidance curricula. Counselors were not asked whether or not the curricula that they currently use are empirically supported, though that would assist in the accountability requirements for counseling programs. Further, participants did report that a majority rarely or occasionally consult with teachers on guidance, but would prefer to do this task with more frequency. Sink (2008) suggests that counselors and teachers should work together in a collaborative effort for student achievement.

The other three component areas of the comprehensive guidance program were also explored in the present study. For the responsive services component, it was found that counselors would prefer to perform more individual counseling services than they are currently able to do. They would also prefer to facilitate more small group counseling sessions. Pre- and post-test style evaluations can be used in both small group and

individual counseling to attest to the effectiveness of the interventions in the responsive services component area. However, individual intervention results are not indicative of a program wide effectiveness. Time and task analysis could be conducted to evaluate if counselors are spending the amount of time recommended by the comprehensive counseling program in each component area. Unfortunately, this too has limitations. The time and task type of evaluation only tells what a counselor is spending time doing, not how effective the program is with these interventions.

An evaluation of responses about the remaining two component areas indicates similar results. The individual student planning component area was addressed in several areas in this survey: individual assessment, individual planning, and academic advising. Counselor respondents indicated that they would prefer to spend more time on all of these counseling activities than what they are currently doing. The final component area is that of system support. Several questions in the survey addressed this area of counselor activity; specifically program development was given attention. Alaska school counselors who participated in this survey research indicated that they would like to spend more time on program development than they are currently performing. This finding is representative of all the component areas; counselors would like to spend more time on these identified counselor activities and less on other non-counseling duties.

Typical duties that become the responsibility of the school counselor that are outside the national model framework include such activities as master schedule duties, testing coordinators, detention room coverage, discipline, classroom coverage, and clerical responsibilities (American School Counselor Association, 2003). These are

activities that do not require a master's degree to complete and as such should not be a responsibility for the school counselor. The counselor that spends significant time on these activities is taken from counseling duties which will eventually compromise the program; however these activities are vital to the operation of the school and must be reassigned to appropriate staff. Reassignment of non-counseling duties is often a difficult task, yet if professional school counselors fill-up their schedules with these non-counseling activities, not only is the program compromised but the counselor is viewed as non-professional within the school building (Madden, 2002).

Common identified barriers to counseling program effectiveness include counselor lack of time, lack of support, and overwhelming work loads (Brott, 2006). These are also the barriers identified by many of the respondents in this study. Approximately 73 percent of the counselors surveyed indicated that they had higher than recommended counselor-to-student ratios. Thirty-two percent of counselors reported that they work in more than one school, a situation that is not addressed by ASCA. In order to implement comprehensive programs in Alaska, counselors need additional support due to the unique challenges in this state. It is not surprising that 12 percent of counselors responded that they need some form of counseling coordinator to improve their programs. It was stated that counselors need someone who understands counseling to be employed at the district office, which in turn would improve training for counselors and delivery of the counseling program.

Counselors in elementary schools in Alaska were asked to report how effective they perceived their own programs. Nine percent of the respondents indicated that they

felt the counseling program in their school was not effective, 49 percent could report somewhat effective, while only 40 percent of counselors felt that their counseling programs were effective. Additionally, counselors were asked to report how supported they felt by the administration, 59 percent felt very supported, leaving 41 percent of counselors less than optimally supported by their administration. How elementary school counselors reported feeling about their programs, as well as what basic elements are in place already indicates that there is room for improvement within programs. It also indicates that close to half of school counseling programs do not have the very elements needed to institute a comprehensive counseling model within their programs at this time, even though the State of Alaska endorses a comprehensive model.

5.3 Limitations

One limitation of this research results from the inability to use a validated and established instrument to survey current practices. The tool that was used in this survey was developed with current literature and professional standards in mind because a pre-existing instrument was not available that would gather the necessary information. An instrument was developed by adaptation from a survey conducted by Jennifer Baggerly and Debra Osborn, with the first author's permission. This survey instrument was used with school counselors in Florida to determine counselor satisfaction and commitment levels toward their current positions and included questions regarding current practices.

Another limitation to this study is that the information collected for this research was self-report data. In research that collects self-report data, reliability and validity are always a concern. One way to address issues of reliability and validity is through asking

respondents for more factual information rather than questions with more subjective answers (Del Boca & Noll, 2000). An example of participants responding differently for objective and subjective questions can be seen in this research when looking at the missing data entries from each survey. In the section of the survey that requests how often counselors are currently performing certain counseling tasks versus how often they would prefer to do the same task, there were on average six missing entries for how often the task is completed and an average 19 missing entries for preference per task.

Additionally, Del Boca and Noll (2000) suggest that respondents may report answers that they believe are more socially desirable or answers that they believe are what the researcher is looking for in the study. This survey was written with consideration of order of response choices so that less influence would be exerted in this study. This limitation must be considered though when looking at how nearly 20 percent of counselors who answered the open-ended question in this survey, indicated that they felt a specific model should be implemented, even though there is a specific model endorsed by this state: the comprehensive counseling model. Additionally, the demographic information shows that a large number of counselors are not in a setting that would easily allow for implementation of a comprehensive model, such as large student-to-counselor ratios, itinerate counseling, or being split among several counseling sites.

5.4 Recommendations

In the state of Alaska, there are three main urban areas: Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau. The rest of the state is considered rural. About 15 percent of the elementary schools in Alaska are in Anchorage, with less than half of those schools employing

elementary school counselors. Approximately five percent of the state's schools are in the Fairbanks area. There are elementary school counselors in all of the schools in the Fairbanks area. Only about three percent of Alaska schools are in the Juneau area, with just over half containing elementary school counselors. Therefore, approximately 23 percent of schools in this state are in urban areas; leaving 77 percent of schools in rural areas. Thus, when examining implementation of the comprehensive counseling program in Alaska, the special challenges that counseling programs in the rural communities face must be taken into account.

The respondents of this study indicated that there are counselors who are working in up to seven elementary schools. Additionally, up to 73 percent of counselors are working with larger than recommended student-to-counselor ratios, with about 30 percent of counselors citing this challenge as one that needed to be addressed to improve programs. One counselor stated that s/he had a ratio of 900:1; yet another counselor stated that s/he only visited sites one or two days a month on average. These kinds of challenges are not addressed in the framework of the comprehensive counseling program presented by ASCA; however, these concerns are the very things that make instituting a comprehensive counseling program challenging for counselors in Alaska.

5.4.1 Adapting the Comprehensive Program

Comprehensive counseling programs are developed around four main areas: foundation, delivery system, management system and accountability. Over half of the respondents to this study indicated that they already had written statements in place that could be the basis of the foundation element of a comprehensive counseling program.

Preparing written statements of the mission and goals of a program is an activity that counselors should engage in for each program that they serve. These written statements align the counseling program with the mission of each of the schools a counselor serves. Additionally, having clear expectations within the counseling program can assist students to be successful, especially when interacting with systems and persons outside of the student's local community (J. Boyle, personal communication, April 23, 2010). Morotti (2006) proposes that there should be a reframing of activities to allow for students to be successful in the dominate culture while continuing to hold onto their core values.

The delivery system may be the most difficult aspect of the comprehensive counseling program to adapt to school counseling programs in Alaska. The difficulty is because delivery systems are based on the presumption that the counselor is physically present in the school and is the one delivering the program. That is not the reality for many counseling programs in Alaska; thus, collaboration becomes essential. The delivery system can be broken down into four component areas in which time allocations are given. Time allocations are likely to be challenging for the counselor who is serving multiple schools. However, through collaboration, coordination, the use of local resources, and technology, the component areas may be able to be addressed.

The four main component areas of the delivery system are guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. The guidance curriculum component may be addressed through collaboration with teachers and staff. More than three-quarters of counselors in Alaska already meet frequently with faculty and staff at their sites. Thus it follows that during these meetings, counselors can

collaborate with faculty and staff to integrate the counseling program into the other core areas of instruction at elementary schools. If counselors are not physically present at a site, there must be collaboration with faculty and staff for the developmental skills to be taught through integration into the rest of the curriculum. In addition to counseling concepts being integrated, there also must be an aligning of the counseling concepts with local traditions and culture; for education, including the counseling program, to play a meaningful role in students' lives, it must reflect a sense of the local culture and traditional values (Morotti, 2006).

The use of technology can be a helpful tool for counselors adapting the individual student planning component area to the reality of Alaskan schools. For example, the state has developed career exploration websites available to every school in Alaska that can be used as a resource for students to explore future career planning. There is an option to allow the counselor to review comments so that the student and the counselor may have access to the student's planning. Other technology-based adaptations include providing information links from the school's homepage to local resources, as well as providing an electronic means for students to request a meeting with the counselor. School counselors may choose to have a mailbox type system in place at their home site where students can drop a note to request to see the counselor. This same idea may be helpful for other school sites through an electronic note to request a meeting with the counselor. This intervention can be helpful in that students are not waiting for the counselor to come to their site before making the request. In addition, counselors can screen for issues that may

need to be addressed before they get to the site again and thus collaborate with school staff or local resources to provide more immediate intervention.

This type of screening for crisis intervention leads into the component area of responsive services. In addition to crisis counseling, small group counseling services may be made accessible to students at various sites by linking them all together in a video-conference. Using this technology, counselors with small populations at various sites who would benefit from specific small group counseling can have those services available. These types of adaptations would require equipment for schools, training for counselors, and support from school faculty and staff to become successful. Students would need to be identified by staff or faculty on site and referred to the counselor for these types of interventions.

The system support component area could be adapted in a similar way to the responsive services area, through the means of technology. There are many valuable training opportunities available through distance education that should not be overlooked. However, if counselors can help remote schools connect with other schools that may need the same type of in-service trainings, this could be a way to support and promote multiple programs.

After examining the foundation, as well as the component areas of the delivery system, there is the management system and accountability left to address as basic areas in building a comprehensive counseling program. These two areas often overlap with each other, as well as with the system support component of the delivery system. There are adaptations in these areas as well that could help make a comprehensive counseling

program a framework that Alaska schools could use. While calendars, advisory councils and statements of responsibility are useful tools that counselors working in rural sites could make good use of, lengthy written plans for student monitoring, closing the gap forms, and allocation of time forms are not. Counselors do not have the ability to complete these written plans for students when not on site all week or when having overwhelming student-to-counselor ratios.

5.4.2 Needed Supports for Adaptations

In order for these previously outlined adaptations to become a reality for counselors serving elementary schools within the state of Alaska, much support is needed. Counselors are already faced with overwhelming student-to-counselor ratios and may not be physically present at the school on a regular basis. ADEED will need to implement many changes to support counselors in efforts to adapt comprehensive counseling programs for use in Alaska, such as developing and supporting a mentoring program, much like the current teacher/administrator state level mentoring program. Additionally, ADEED should be charged with educating administrators regarding the role and responsibilities of professional school counselors. Finally, employing counseling coordinators at the district levels could allow for the support and assistance that counselors need to develop and evaluate comprehensive counseling programs.

There are standards, competencies and indicators provided at the national, state and local levels outlining student achievement goals. These standards, however, are a loose set of student achievement goals used to aim the counseling program towards an effective comprehensive counseling program. Counselors in Alaska are operating with

demographics not addressed by ASCA, they do not have the time or resources available to adapt programs on their own while also attempting to deliver programs. A guide which takes into consideration the cultural aspects of local districts as well as student standards, and is formatted to give flow or organization to the program at the district levels, would be an asset to counselors in the field. Currently, standards and the framework for the comprehensive counseling program are provided in pieces requiring the counselor to construct and fit together to form a model or program. This presents a challenge for counselors who are already stretched too thin.

Local districts in Alaska along with ADEED can partner through counseling coordinators to organize the student standards, community needs, and cultural considerations into an organized model with units that flow into a cohesive whole. Working from a more detailed model with over views as well as distinct aspects will provide counselors with a toolbox from which to provide programs. Additionally a separately designed suggested model for itinerate counselors could be established which would highlight the most critical aspects of the counseling program to be delivered, while also indicating the areas that would be more easily integrated into the core curriculum areas and delivered by teachers considering that the counselor will not be physically present at the school site for the majority of the school year.

Further, the Alaska chapter of ASCA has the opportunity to provide continuing education opportunities for counselors within the state to gain familiarity with comprehensive counseling programs. This organization could work in partnership with local universities and school districts to provide this training to current counselors in the

field as well as assisting ADEED in connecting counselors within a mentoring program. All professional counselors are required to seek continuing education credits to keep their certification status, thus counseling educators can structure continuing education courses to address how to implement a comprehensive guidance program as well as assist future school counselors to understand the different perspective that school counselors bring to the school team, such as empathy, understanding, mediation and collaboration skills, and how this enhances student success when used in part with the rest of the team (Light, 2005). Additionally, Jones Sears and Haag Granello (2002) propose that counselors must be trained in advocacy and how to change established systems as well as collaborative and communication skills.

At the national level, ASCA presents the comprehensive counseling program national model as the best practice for school counseling programs. ASCA also gives guides for the basic structure in building counseling programs, such as student-to-counselor ratios and specific time allocations. What ASCA does not provide is a recommendation for adapting programs to conditions such as those in Alaska, where counselors are splitting their time between multiple sites or experiencing ratios up to 900:1. Additionally, of the 366 elementary schools identified within the state, only 124 schools were identified as having counselors for this study, which leaves more than half of the schools without a full-time counselor. Considering these extreme challenges, ASCA should be charged with advocating for all states to adhere to the recommended ratios and building blocks of the comprehensive program.

5.4.3 Increasing Strategic Interventions

Major critics of the comprehensive counseling program suggest that rather than endorsing the effectiveness of a comprehensive program, school counselors should be looking to implement strategic interventions (Brown & Trusty, 2005). Using strategic interventions may be one of the areas that Alaskan itinerate counselors could focus more on with their programs. Being on-site for one day each month, or even one day a week, makes the goal of implementing a comprehensive counseling program for all students unrealistic. One of the main concepts guiding the comprehensive counseling program is that this framework will open the counseling program to all students. The concept is what should be focused on for schools in Alaska rather than the framework. Through collaboration with on-site faculty and staff, coordination with local resources and the use of strategic interventions, counselors may still aim towards opening the counseling program to all students.

Thus far, recommendations have been made to adapt the comprehensive counseling program based on the unique challenges that professional school counselors are facing in rural elementary schools in Alaska. Recommendations could also be made from the perspective of what students and families are experiencing as challenges and needs. This perspective alters the agenda from merely adapting a program to fit to the unique circumstances of a delivery setting not addressed by the program, to providing a framework that is driving by the needs of the communities that are being served.

Students in Alaska face many challenges that have already been addressed in this paper. For example, rural school locations can leave students isolated from services that

they may be in need of, such as access to the school counselor, due to the counselor being on site for only a few days a month. Students may also face many other personal/social concerns in their lives. This can be demonstrated in that suicide rates in Alaska have been nearly double those of the national average between 1994 to 2000. Within those rates, rural locations report nearly double the number of suicide completions than urban locations in Alaska (Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, 2010). Additionally, there were over 5,000 substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect for Alaska in 2009 with over 2,000 out-of-home placements each month of that year (Office of Children's Services, 2010). Further, it is estimated that over seven percent of the state's youth population is currently experiencing serious emotional disturbances (Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, 2010).

Even though, the number of students with severe emotional and behavioral concerns may be small, the effect that those students can have on the classroom and the rest of the students is significant (Eber et al., 2008). Baggerly and Borkowski (2004) further show how providing the needed strategic interventions for a student can not only assist them in making pro-social changes but that the entire classroom can benefit from these interventions with the identified student. This indicates that services targeted at a particular student may be a beneficial area for school counselors with limited time and larger than recommended case loads to begin focusing on within their counseling programs. This may best be accomplished through the use of strategic interventions in the form of wraparound services.

The concept of wraparound services was first developed in the United States in the 1980s. Wraparound services have been increasingly used in providing services to students and families since that time (Wyles, 2007). Services for students are developed through a four phase process in the wraparound concept. In the initial phase, teams are formed from both informal and formal supports in the student's life, a key component in developing successful interventions. Additionally, the nature of the concern is identified and strengths and needs are addressed in phase one. In phase two, a plan is developed to address the needs of the student building from the strengths and including as many supports as needed. Phase three is the phase in which team members continue to implement strategies and evaluate the success of these interventions, changes are made as needed throughout this process. The fourth and final phase of wraparound treatment interventions is transitioning. The team plans for cessation of current formal supports or begins preparing for a transition in services (Eber et al., 2008)

Wraparound services have been associated with decreased out-of-home placements and decreased placements in most restrictive educational settings (Wyles, 2007). This is a whole system approach where a student in his or her entirety is considered, not just in the area of school life. Local educators in Alaska have contributed much research and guidance in the area connecting school with the rest of a student's life in order to make it a relevant and meaningful experience for students. In the publication *Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools*, it is stated that while we have content standards for students and performance standards for faculty, cultural standards should not be overlooked. The joint authors of this publication state, "The emphasis is on

fostering a strong connection between what students experience in school and their lives out of school by providing opportunities for students to engage in in-depth experiential learning in real-world contexts" (Assembly of Alaska Native Educators, 1998, pg. 3).

Parents are perhaps the most influential persons in students' lives (Cuthbert, 2002). It is an essential part of developing a strong counseling program to involve parents. Cuthbert states that it is important that counselors educate parents about the connections between emotional health and academic achievement. It is believed that once this connection is made parents will become strong supporters of the counseling program. Students who have parent involvement are more likely to have increased academic success and more pro-social behaviors than peers without this involvement. It can be difficult to secure parental involvement if it is viewed in the traditional sense of what the parents can do to further the schools goals. However, if parental involvement is viewed from a perspective of supporting the student within and outside of the school, from a team approach, then parental involvement may be more often secured (Minke & Anderson, 2005). Wraparound services are based from a perspective that the family has strengths from which to build and that the student and family must be highly involved in their own intervention planning (Wyles, 2007).

Although students are in school for a major part of their day, there may be other areas of a student's life which could affect their academic progress. Infrequent classroom guidance lessons aimed at providing systemic prevention education and skill development may not be the most effective means of addressing student needs. Support from outside the academic and professional realms may need to be drawn together to

form a team committed to the student's success. Wraparound based services can be especially helpful when events outside the school environment are contributing to difficulties within the school and impacting the student's achievement as well as the achievement of other students in the room. This type of intervention can provide a structured team approach to supplying supports the child needs to be successful in the school environment within the least restrictive setting (Eber et al., 2008).

It must be remembered though, that counselors can not provide the solutions to concerns facing students in Alaska individually, it must be a collaborative effort, pulling together many resources both formal and informal areas within the student's life (J. Boyle, personal communication, April 23, 2010). Alaska is beginning to see the local efforts of researchers, counselor educators, and professional school counselors in programs such as *The Copper River Project* (Morotti, 2008). This project successfully pulled together the concepts of a comprehensive counseling program with those of wraparound services in an effort to deliver effective school counseling services through School-Based Family Counseling.

Elementary school counseling in Alaska is a challenging and often difficult task, whereby resources are limited and needs are vast. One aspect when building counseling programs in Alaska which should be kept in consideration is that of culture. Alaska has a uniquely diverse culture, which varies from one location to another within the state. Educational programs, including counseling programs, should be built from a perspective of becoming culturally inclusive, so that students may strive to be successful in the dominate culture through an appreciation of their traditional values (Morotti, 2006).

In many Alaska elementary schools, students are left with itinerate counselors who only visit their school a couple days a month or a counselor who is trying to provide a comprehensive counseling program to up to 900 students. This can leave a student who is in need of assistance in a long line to get access to the counselor, while the counselor provides preventative classroom guidance lessons to all the grade levels, if that is, the counselor is following the recommended state and national program frameworks. Initial research into using a wraparound services approach is positive for intended outcomes (Maynard-Moody, 1994). This program, or other similar programs, pull from the local resources and integrate the students' strengths and values into interventions which could be effective for use in Alaska communities.

5.5 Further Research

The comprehensive counseling program model presented by ASCA has been adopted for use in all schools in Alaska by the state school board. Given this declaration, adaptations to this program must be considered if counselors in a predominately rural state are going to implement this program with any success. Probable adaptations have been identified and presented in the recommendations section of this paper. Through the use of collaboration and technology, counselors may be able to implement an adapted version of the comprehensive counseling program in Alaska.

Further research in the area of school counseling in Alaska is needed through pilot studies to determine the effectiveness of these adaptations on programs and the resulting student achievement. Additionally, further research into specific curriculum development in which culturally relevant counseling themes are integrated into core academic areas is

needed. Further research is also indicated in examining a different approach of wraparound based services. Initial evaluations of wraparound services are showing positive outcomes; however, further studies into comparisons with current recommended approaches should be conducted.

5.6 Summary

The Counselor Activities Survey yielded data that indicated nearly half of respondents to this survey did not have a written counseling program, a written job description, conduct needs assessments, or could indicate a familiarity with a comprehensive program. In the component areas of guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support, it was found that overall counselors are performing the tasks promoted by ASCA's national model for comprehensive counseling programs. Alaska elementary counselors are also indicating that they want to do tasks in the component areas with more frequency. The national model suggests that non-counseling tasks be eliminated as much as possible from the counselor's duties. This preference is reflected in the data from the Alaska elementary school counselors.

Additionally, it appears that about half of elementary counseling programs are not in a position conducive to implementing a comprehensive counseling program; counselors are delivering services in less than optimal conditions. There also appears to be nothing within ASCA's national model that addresses many of these challenges, such as large student-to-counselor ratios and serving multiple locations. Adaptations are needed if elementary counselors in Alaska are to implement the recommended comprehensive counseling program. Conversely, rather than adapting a program so that

students in Alaska can fit into the program, there is a different approach that counselors may use in servicing the needs of students and families at their schools. Through the use of wraparound based services, counselors may serve as a team facilitator in addressing the concerns of students in Alaskan elementary schools.

Counselors within Alaska have offered suggestions to the dilemmas faced in the state when trying to implement a comprehensive program. When counselors are spread between multiple locations, case loads are extreme, or counselors are new to their positions, it stands to reason that added supports would need to be put into place to facilitate program development. When asked what would improve programs, 12 percent of counselors recognized the need for a counseling coordinator. A coordinator could help facilitate program development for already over-stretched counselors. Additionally, counselors presented ideas such as implementing a specific model, eliminating non-counseling duties, expanding the curriculum resources, and clearly defining roles. All of these ideas would be promoted through the presence of a counseling coordinator at the district levels working in partnership to develop workable and clear models for Alaska.

Another suggestion, given by counselors currently working in Alaska elementary schools, that bears consideration is mentoring. A relatively small percentage of counselors suggested mentors; however, it may be a very powerful untapped resource. In Alaska there are already mentoring programs in place for new teachers and principals, so the basic structure for this type of support is already in place. Of the respondents, 68 percent indicated that they had been in their current position for less than five years. Additionally, counselors with less than five years experience hold more anxiety about

implementing programs, and may benefit greatly from a mentoring relationship when attempting to implement a comprehensive counseling program. Finding ways to promote successful counseling programs and increase student achievement, while at the same time supporting professional school counselors in their positions within schools, is an important endeavor for all Alaskan stakeholders. It becomes apparent just how important when considering that at the end of the 2008/2009 school year, 33 percent of elementary school counselors who responded to this survey either planned to leave their position or were undecided about their plans to continue in their position as an elementary professional school counselor.

Conclusion

Accountability is a term that has come to rest heavily on the school system in this country. Increasingly, professional school counselors are beginning to be required to not only show what they are doing but also how it is helping student achievement. Many professionals within the school building do not know what exactly a school counselor should be doing, thus accountability is very difficult to demonstrate. Professional organizations, such as the American School Counselor Association have put a great deal of effort into defining and guiding the professional school counselor. However, even after a detailed job description and program model has been outlined, there are professionals who, because of specific needs of their school, choose not to implement or to only partially implement a comprehensive school counseling program. Professional school counselors within Alaska face all the same challenges as other counselors across the nation with the added job stress of many rural and isolated locations.

In their 1973 report submitted to the Alaska Department of Education, Spaziani et al. (1973) had already identified that there existed significant differences in principals' and counselors' perceptions regarding the school counselors' role and the importance of counseling functions. It was suggested in that report that more organization was needed to develop a philosophy for guidance and counseling programs. As well as developing measurable objectives, methods of operation and methods of evaluation for Alaska counseling programs.

Sink and Yilik-Downer (2001) found in a national study focusing on how school counselors viewed their comprehensive guidance and counseling programs that newer

counselors held more anxiety about implementing a comprehensive program. Those counselors who had less than five years experience felt that collaboration was an essential part of implementing a program. Sink and Yilik-Downer proposed that their research indicated a need for more experienced counselors to work with newer counselors in developing their own programs. The development of mentoring relationships is particularly relevant in this state where 68 percent of counselors who participated in this study indicated that they had been employed in their current position for less than five years.

Additionally, to ensure the future success of school counseling there needs to be several components in place. There needs to be a joining together of counselors in support of each other through mentoring and supervision. There should be consideration for the use of counseling coordinators. Also, the counseling program as a whole should be supported through professional membership and literary contributions (Sink, 2002). Finally, research into demonstrating that counseling programs and interventions to support successful programs are effective is essential at this time in the development of school counseling as a profession (Bauman et al., 2003; Whiston, 2002).

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Appendix A: Delivery of Comprehensive Guidance Programs

Roles and Functions:

Counseling | Consultation | Coordination

delivered through the

Four Components:

Guidance Curriculum	Responsive Services	System Support	Individual Planning
Percent of counselor's time			
35-45%	30-40%	10-15%	5-10%
Focused on skill development and application	prevention and intervention	program delivery/support	student planning and goal setting
Through classroom guidance lessons addressing student competencies	small group/indiv. counseling dealing with specific concerns, working with staff	planning implementing and program evaluation professional development, educating families	one-on-one planning assessing and goal setting

aimed at reaching specific

Student Compentencies:

Academic | Personal/Social | Career

Counselor Activity Survey

Demographics:

1) How long have you been a school counselor?
0-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16 or more years

2) How long have you been employed with your current position?
0-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16 or more years

3) How would you describe your ethnicity?
African American Asian Alaska Native/Native American
Hispanic Caucasian
Other:_____

4) What is your age range?
20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 70+

5) What is your gender?
Female Male

6) How many students are in your school(s)?
>250 250-350 350-450 450+

7) How many schools do you work in?_____

8) Were you a teacher before becoming a school counselor?
Yes, I was a teacher No, I was in another field
No, but I have my undergraduate degree in education

Professional Questions

1) How often do you receive supervision or peer consultation?
weekly monthly quarterly yearly never

2) Have you supervised a practicum or intern counseling student in the last few years?
Yes No

3) Do you believe you need more training to effectively supervise a student?
very much some little very little

4) Have you mentored a new counselor to the profession?
Yes No

5) Do you conduct needs assessments with parents/teachers/staff?
Yes, often I have done this I have never done this

6) Do you conduct evaluations to see if needs are being met?
Yes, often I have done this I have never done this

7) Which professional development activities have you done in the last year?
Read articles Attended State/Local Workshops
Attended National Conferences or Workshops
District In-services Other:_____

Adapted from: Baggerly, J. N. (2002). Florida school counselors' survey 2000: Results and recommendations. *Florida Educational Research Council Research Bulletin, 33* (3,4). Retrieved from http://www.firn.edu/webfiles/others/ferc/Default.htm

Time Spent on Counselor's Duties:

Please indicate the frequency with which you do and with which you would prefer to perform each task listed below on a **weekly** basis.

Ratings: **1** = I never do this task; **2**= I rarely do this task (1-2days/wk); **3**= I occasionally do this task (2-3days/wk); **4**= I routinely do this task (3-4 days/wk); **5**= I frequently do this task (4-5 days/wk)

Activity	Actual	Prefer
Classroom Guidance		
Individual Counseling		
Small Group Counseling		
Career Counseling		
Crisis Counseling		
Counseling on Substance Abuse Issues		
Individual Student Planning		
Consulting with Teachers		
Consulting with Parents		
Consulting with Administrators		
Coordinating Testing		
Developing Lesson Plans for Group Guidance		
Coordinating IEP/504 Teams		
Coordinating with Teachers about Group Guidance		
Academic Advising		
Administrative Duties		
Dealing with Student Behavior Issues		
Other Duties (bus, lunch room, etc.)		
Program Development		
Professional Development		
Coordinating Special Events		
IndividualStudentAssessment		

Program Questions:

1) Do you utilize specific guidance curricula? Yes No
If yes, which one_____

2) Do you have a written plan for your guidance and counseling program?
Yes No In the process of writing

4) Is there a written job description for School Counselors in your program?
Yes, clearly written Written and somewhat clear
Written and not clear Not written

6) How supported do you feel by your administration?
Very supported Somewhat supported
Not really supported Unsupported

7) Do you meet regularly with teachers and staff?
Frequently Sometimes I have met before Never

8) Please indicate your employment plans for the next two years?
Intend to continue as a school counselor
Plan to quit Plan to retire Undecided

9) How effective do you believe the counseling program is at your location?
Very effective Somewhat effective
Limited effectivness Not effective

10) Are you familiar with any comprehensive counseling model?
Yes, with_____ Somewhat familiar with_____
No, I am not familiar with any models

* What would improve the counseling program within your building or district?_____

Appendix C: Initial Contact Letter

Samantha McMorrow M.Ed., LPC, CDC I
ftsgp@uaf.edu

C/O Dr. Allan Morotti
UAF – Education Dept.
P.O. Box 756480
Fairbanks, AK. 99775-6480

April 10, 2009

Dear (participants name),

I would like to introduce my self and my purpose in contacting you. I am a student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks conducting my doctoral research in the area of elementary school counseling. Within the next couple of weeks I will be sending you a survey which will greatly help me in my research. I encourage you to take a few minutes to complete this coming survey and have your experience within the K-6 level heard in the area of school counseling research for Alaska. All answers will be kept confidential and if you have any questions once you receive the survey please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your time,

Samantha McMorrow

Appendix D: Second Contact Letter

Samantha McMorrow M.Ed., LPC, CDC I
ftsgp@uaf.edu

C/O Dr. Allan Morotti
UAF – Education Dept.
P.O. Box 756480
Fairbanks, AK. 99775-6480

April 22, 2009

Dear (participants name),

Hello, I recently contacted you regarding the graduate research I am conducting. Please let me introduce myself more fully at this time my name is Samantha McMorrow. I graduated with a master's degree in Guidance and Counseling from the University of Alaska Fairbanks 3 years ago. Since that time, I have been employed in a day treatment facility serving elementary students. The roles and duties I now perform are different from what I trained for, and that began my interest in "what do school counselors do" and "are the national standards in line with the expectations for Alaska school counselors?" This is the basis of my dissertation work. I am again a graduate student at University of Alaska Fairbanks in the Education Department. I am working towards a Ph.D. in Counselor Education, and I need your help with my research.

Attached you will find a survey instrument. This survey will take perhaps fifteen minutes of your time to complete. Your participation is crucial. If you choose to assist me in this valuable research, just complete the attached survey and return it in the enclosed stamped envelope. Your returned survey will be taken as consent to be included in this research. Notice that all information is kept strictly confidential. If you would like the results of this research sent to you please fill out the information below, this will be separated from all survey answers.

Thank you very much for your time,

Samantha McMorrow

Complete and send to address listed above, or email me to request a copy of the results of this survey.

Please send research results to:

_____(email)

☐ Yes, I would like to be contacted to potentially become part of a follow up focus group/interview. _____(email)

Appendix E: Follow-Up Contact Letter

Samantha McMorrow M.Ed., LPC, CDC I
ftsgp@uaf.edu

C/O Dr. Allan Morotti
UAF – Education Dept.
P.O. Box 756480
Fairbanks, AK. 99775-6480

May 12, 2009

Dear (participants name),

I would like to thank you for your valuable participation in my research study, if you have not yet completed the survey I strongly encourage you to take a few minutes to do so now. As a professional counselor, I know your time is very limited and I truly appreciate your assistance with my research.

I am sending you an additional survey at this time. If you would like results sent to you please complete the section below. This will be separated from all survey answers.

Thank you very much for your time,

Samantha McMorrow

Complete and send to address listed above, or email me to request a copy of the results of this survey.

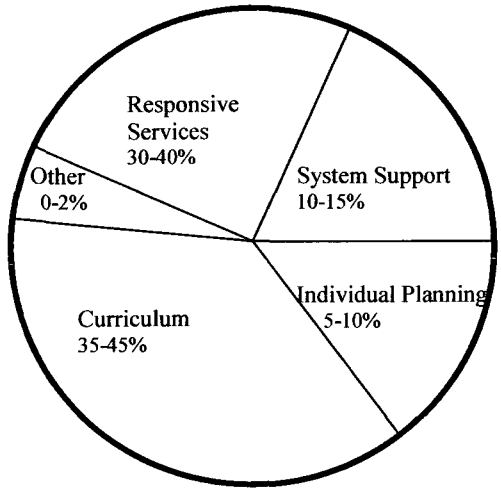
Please send research results to:

_____(email)

☐ Yes, I would like to be contacted to potentially become part of a follow up focus group/interview. _____(email)

Appendix F: Suggested Time Distributions

Adapted from *The Comprehensive Counseling Program for Alaska Public Schools*



ELEMENTARY LEVEL
Suggested Time Distribution

2 ¾ to 3 ½ hrs (14-18wkly)– **Curriculum**

½ to ¾ hrs (2-4wkly)-**Individual Planning**

2 ½ to 3 ¼ hrs (12-16wkly)–**Responsive Services**

¾ to 1 ¼ hrs (4-6wkly)– **System Support**

¼ to ½ hrs (0-8wkly) – **Other Activities**

Curriculum: An effective school counseling program contains curriculum that provides activities that are consistently presented to all students in grades K-12. The purpose of these curriculum areas is to proactively address students' academic, career, and personal/social developmental needs. The Alaska School Counseling Program has adopted the National Academic Counseling Standards for curriculum. The three curriculum areas include Academic Development, Career Development, and Personal/Social Development.

Individual Student Planning: Individual Student Planning consists of activities that help all students plan, monitor and manage their own learning as well as their personal and career development. Within this component, students evaluate their educational occupational and personal goals and plans. These activities may be delivered on an individual or group basis under the supervision and direction of the counselor.

Responsive Services: Responsive Services address the immediate needs and concerns of individuals and groups of students, parents, staff, and/or community. Counselor responsibilities include: prevention, intervention, crisis response, referrals and resources.

System Support: System support, as a component of a comprehensive school counseling program, consists of activities designed to enhance and support the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. By utilizing a team approach, school counseling programs serve to enhance the total educational program. Counselors help teachers and staff develop meaningful activities that assist students in achieving high academic standards, developing employability skills, and utilizing good personal and social skills necessary to become productive citizens. This team approach is essential to increase student success as measured by assessments, such as the benchmark tests.

Other Activities: Other activities that professional school counselors often engage in throughout the school day include substituting for classroom teachers, having bus duty or lunch duty. More sporadically throughout the school year, professional counselors will perform activities such as balancing classroom lists or acting as the testing coordinator.

Appendix G: Improving the Counseling Program

What would improve the counseling program within your building or district?

Smaller ratios of students per counselor:

I would be more effective if I was not spread so thin.
Smaller caseload.
Smaller caseload, I have two schools, 900 students.
More counselors.
More time for groups.
More time with students, need to be employed FULL TIME each elementary school only gets 0.5 FTE counselor.
Work with fewer students more in depth.
I am an itinerant – not as effective as when I was the counselor full time in one school in the lower 48. Our district population is low by comparision – this is the reality of the job here. Much time is spent on travel. I'm at sites one or two days a month on average, except for my home site.
Not spread so thin.
Increased staffing.
Having each elementary counselor have only 1 school!
More individual counseling time and group time, play therapy time.
Hire more counselors.
Having each elementary counselor have only one school.
A counselor at every school – more time in each school.
Having a full time counselor.
Sometimes there is not enough time in the day to meet with all the students who have needs to be addressed.
Provide more group activities such as peer counseling.
Not having the challenges of traveling to remote sites – winter weather makes this a real test. Have more time in each school to deliver lessons and spend time with the individual students.
Less travel, 1 school instead of 2.
Huge caseload for one person who does so much.
More counselors (one at each school).
Having a full time counselor at each elementary school.
A lower counselor to student ratio or more flexibility with classes (e.g. I cover teacher preps so this trumps anything that may arise with students).
More time with students.
Hired more counselors on a 300:1 ratio.
Current ratio = 1:443; Improvement = 2:443 (more in line with ASCA model).
1 counselor per site.
Time.
More time.

Implementation of a specific model/plan:

To get ASCA's RAMP.
Formalize some processes.
Completion of plan of service.
Having clear, mandated guidelines to follow so principals can't use us however they want (enless SPED meetings).
Having clear, mandated guidelines to follow so that principals cannot use us as they see fit (asst. principal duties – discipline).
Have a concrete written curriculum for all elementary school counselors. Our district is working on getting everybody on the same page.
If all school counselors followed ASCA's model.
A general outline of content to be taught during a given month throughout the district.
More unified curriculum between all school counselors.
To have basic guidelines for all elementary counselors but on sight management.
All counselors doing the same work.
Consistency among buildings.
A comprehensive guidance model for K-12.

Employing a Counseling Coordinator:

Hiring of an Elementary School Counselor Coordinator.
A supervisor of the counselors.
We currently do not have a counseling director, which would improve training and delivery, we also have very high turn over with counselors and principals in our district, longevity is key out here in rural positions and without a director to oversee training of new hires, this responsibility inevitably falls on other counselors within the district. Distance hampers us meeting as a group.
A district representative.
A counselor coordinator.
Primary supervisor has a counselor background so is better able to understand and support type of program needed in each school, allowing for flexibility with the population and needs of the particular school.
Someone who understands counseling be employed in district office.
Got a position with someone filling the roll of counselor supervisor or coordinator.
Training and planning time with middle school and high school partner schools, a supervisor for elementary and middle school and high school counselors.

Elimination of Non-Counseling Duties

Taking away non-counseling duties.
Eliminate extra duties such as being responsible for all testing, behavior, cafeteria duties – etc. Problems in rural AK. Is much different from city or lower 48. Everyone has to be a team for the betterment of the school.

Less Administrative work, less discipline work.
Less responsibility for teachers' prep times.
I wear too many hats, counselor, registrar, tutor, pseudo-administration, etc. Let me be a counselor full time.
Less secretarial/administrative duties (report cards in charge of school master, etc.) fewer hats to wear, i.e. 504 coordinator, student assistance team coordinator.
Making sure that counselors are not locked into covering teachers prep times.
More time for counseling and life skills, less time spent testing!
Stopped using counselors for prep periods.

Expanded Curriculum/Resources:

More materials dealing exclusively with Natives.
Bigger budget for new materials.
Not cut or decrease program (school doesn't have counseling curricula or materials and not in budget).
If the district would provide more money for books and curriculum.
Continuing to create units and purchase curriculum materials.
Better resources that target Native students.
More group resources.
Money for materials.
A curriculum.
I'm proud of my program and feel that it is quite effective. For improvement, I'm always working on increasing parent communication, seeking new/different resources, varying group structures, etc. It's a matter of "polishing" rather than "developing" my program.

Clearly Defined Roles:

Clearly defined role and duties.
Better job description.
Clear job description.
Better knowledge of the role of the counselor.
Similar roles throughout the elementary building.

Developing a Peer Mentoring Program:

Having a mentor/peer to help evaluate the program. Someone to reflect with on the program more critically.
Mentoring program specific to counseling.

Increasing Parent Involvement:

An effective outreach that would facilitate more parent involvement.
More family buy-in.
More interaction with parents.

More Support:

Being supported and recognized.
Administrative Support.

Increased Budget:

Money.
Budgetary support.
Money.
Higer budget.

Less Turn-Over:

Just staying for a while.

More or better facilities/space:

More physical space, own classroom or bigger office, more flexible schedule.
Better (more) space for a counselor.